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ABSTRACT

This report examines urban district hiring practices and their effect on applicant attrition and teacher quality, analyzing data from four hard-to-staff urban districts collected via telephone surveys with applicants who left for other districts, written surveys, focus groups with preservice and inservice teachers, and applicant tracking data. Results indicated that with aggressive recruitment, teachers applied in large numbers. However, all of the districts failed to make job offers until mid-to-late summer, which left applicants hanging in limbo for months. Frustrated with waiting, 31 to 60 percent of applicants withdrew from the hiring process, often to accept jobs with districts that made offers earlier. Many of the best candidates with the most options were the most likely to abandon hard-to-staff districts in the face of hiring delays, forcing districts to fill their vacancies from applicant pools with higher percentages of unqualified and uncertified teachers. Most teachers who withdrew their applications were committed to teaching in urban schools, and many wanted jobs in high-needs areas. Three widespread hiring policies tied the hands of human resources departments: vacancy notification requirements, teacher union transfer requirements, and late budget timetables and inadequate forecasting. Recommended solutions include revising teacher notification requirements, reforming collective bargaining transfer requirements, and addressing budget barriers. An appendix charts the roles of various stakeholders in the reform effort. (Contains 21 endnotes.) (SM)

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Missed Opportunities:

How We Keep High-Quality Teachers Out of Urban Classrooms

By Jessica Levin
and Meredith Quinn

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Executive Summary

It is widely recognized that no factor under school control affects student achievement more than the quality of the teacher in the classroom.[1] Yet, on average, low-income and minority children have lower-quality teachers who are far more likely to be uncertified, to have scored poorly on college and licensure exams, and to be teaching outside of their field.[2]

Conventional wisdom attributes this disparity to the inability of large city school systems to attract high-caliber teachers. But the reality is that, thanks to stepped-up recruitment efforts, high-quality teacher candidates regularly apply in large numbers to teach in hard-to-staff districts. The problem is, they do not get hired.

Strategic recruitment brought hundreds of applicants, but 31-58% of them withdrew; 50-70% of withdrawers cited late hiring timelines as a major reason they found other jobs.

The failure of many large urban districts to make job offers to new teachers until July or August is largely to blame for this problem. Because of hiring delays, these districts lose substantial numbers of teacher candidates—including the most promising and those who can teach in high-demand shortage areas—to suburban classrooms that typically hire earlier.

As a result, urban districts lose the very candidates they need in their classrooms to meet the No Child Left Behind mandates, and millions of disadvantaged students in America's cities pay the price with lower-quality teachers than their suburban peers.

To date, the evidence on the consequences of late hiring timelines has been largely anecdotal.[3] In this report, The New Teacher Project provides an in-depth study of urban district hiring practices and their effect on applicant attrition and teacher quality by analyzing data from four "hard-to-staff" urban districts. These representative districts, which agreed to let us gather extensive data on the condition of anonomity, comprise three large districts in the Southwest, Midwest, and Eastern regions and a mid-size district in the Midwest. The districts average just fewer than 73,000 students each, and the largest district has more than 150,000 students. The

percentage of non-white students in these districts ranges from 62 percent to 85 percent. Between two-thirds and three-quarters of students qualify for free or reduced-price lunch.[4]

The report relies on a wealth of sources—applicant tracking data, telephone surveys with applicants who left for other districts, written surveys, and focus groups—to quantify the length of hiring delays, the subsequent scale of applicant attrition, and its very real effect on teacher quality in urban schools.

Withdrawers had significantly higher GPAs and were 40% more likely to have a degree in their teaching field than new hires.

What Our Data Show About Late Hiring and the Loss of High-Quality Applicants

With aggressive recruitment, teachers apply in large numbers:
By implementing targeted, high-impact recruitment strategies, all four urban districts received hundreds, if not thousands, of applicants—many more than they needed to successfully fill their existing vacancies. One district received 4,000 applications for fewer than 200 spots. The other three districts received roughly 750 to 800 applications—five to seven times as many applicants as available positions. Equally significant, given these high recruitment figures, is that up to 37 percent of the candidates applied to teach in high-need areas, including math, science, special education, and education for English Language Learners.[5] But despite having hundreds of applicants in high-need areas and many more total applicants than vacancies to fill, each district was left scrambling at the 11th hour to fill its openings.

Applicants withdraw after months in limbo:
Each of the four districts failed to make job offers until mid-to-late summer. This left applicants hanging in limbo for months, not knowing if or where they would teach. Fed up with waiting, anywhere from 31 percent to almost 60 percent of applicants withdrew from the hiring process, often to accept jobs with districts that made offers earlier. Of those who withdrew, the majority (50 percent to 70 percent) cited the late hiring timeline as a major reason they took other jobs.

Districts lose stronger applicants and hire weaker ones:
The most serious issue is that many of the best candidates, who have the most options, were the most likely to abandon hard-to-staff districts in the face of hiring delays. This forced these districts to fill their vacancies from an applicant pool with higher percentages of unqualified and uncertified teachers. In fact, the initial findings of this study reveal that applicants who withdrew from the hiring process had

significantly higher undergraduate GPAs, were 40 percent more likely to have a degree in their teaching field, and were significantly more likely to have completed educational coursework than new hires.[6]

Most of the teachers who withdraw their applications are committed to teaching in urban schools, and many want jobs in high-need areas: Withdrawers were serious applicants. Despite the difficulties and delays they experienced, four out of five of them said they would like to be considered again for a teaching position with the urban district. Almost half said they definitely or probably would have accepted an offer from the urban district if it had come earlier. Equally significant, between 37 percent and 69 percent of the known withdrawers were candidates for hard-to-fill positions.

Three Hiring Policies Drive Hiring Failures

Three policies outside of HR control—vacancy notifications, teacher union transfer rights, and late budgets—seriously undermine efforts to hire earlier and turn quality applicants into urban teachers.

The prevalent explanations for late hiring are poor design and execution by district human resources offices: a cumbersome application process, too many layers of bureaucracy, inadequate customer service, poor data systems, and an overall lack of urgency. Many urban districts do indeed suffer from these problems that not only delay hiring but also anger applicants. However, The New Teacher Project observed three widespread hiring policies that would tie the hands of even the most competent human resources department. They include:

1. Vacancy notification requirements, which typically allow retiring or resigning teachers to provide very late notice of their intent to depart, thereby making it very difficult to know which vacancies will exist in September. Three of the four districts had a summer notification deadline for departing teachers or none at all, while the fourth had a mid-May requirement that was rarely enforced.

2. Teachers union transfer requirements, which often further stall hiring by giving existing teachers the first pick of openings before any new teacher can be hired. Timetables provided in union contracts and local laws frequently undermine expedited transfer processes by extending transfer decisions until a few months, weeks, or—in some cases—days before schools reopen. Collective bargaining policies that require schools to hire transferring teachers create additional delays by making principals reluctant to post vacancies and interview for fear of being forced to accept a transferring teacher they do not want.

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3. Late budget timetables and inadequate forecasting, which foster chronic budget uncertainties and leave administrators unsure about which positions will be funded in their schools. State budget timelines are a major source of the budget delay and uncertainty. In 46 states, the fiscal year does not end until June 30; even then, states may not need to pass a budget if they seek an extension.

Although frequently overlooked by policymakers and education reformers alike, these three policy barriers seriously undermine efforts by urban school systems to turn quality applicants into teachers.

To solve the teacher quality gap, stakeholders must unite around the goal of hiring and providing school placements for most new teachers by May 1 each year.

Working Toward a Solution: Removing Barriers to Earlier Hiring

Given the nature of the problem, the solutions are more complex than those commonly proposed. Stepped-up recruitment campaigns and additional incentives to attract high-quality applicants, while essential, will not solve the teacher quality gap as long as urban districts' own hiring processes, policies and contractual rules prevent them from hiring the right teachers.

Key district, teachers union, school and state stakeholders must unite around the aggressive goal of hiring and providing specific school placements for the vast majority of new teachers by May 1 each year. We know this will be difficult and that a phase-in period may be necessary. During this phase-in period, these stakeholders must commit to hiring and placing at least 30 percent to 40 percent of new teachers by May 1, and the remainder by June 1.

Meeting these timelines will require changing the policies and practices currently responsible for late and ineffective hiring.

Revise teacher notification requirements

States, districts, and unions must ensure early notification by resigning or retiring teachers and must remove disincentives for providing early notice.

Reform collective bargaining transfer requirements

Teachers unions and management must agree to move up and expedite teacher transfer processes and work toward enabling principals and schools to consider external and internal candidates equally.

Address budget barriers
State and local budget-makers must promote earlier and more predictable budgets and must insulate the highest-need schools from budget fluctuations.

Revamp the roles and systems of human resources departments
To take advantage of the above-mentioned policy changes to accelerate hiring, HR departments must develop effective and efficient systems for receiving, processing, tracking, and placing applicants. They must also give schools an earlier and larger role in the hiring process.

This report acknowledges that any district seeking to address these challenges will have to overcome significant hurdles. Recommendations affecting union protections, such as vacancy notification and teacher transfer requirements, may be particularly difficult to achieve. In all four areas, however, reform will be essential to enabling large urban districts to match the aggressive mid-spring hiring schedules of many suburban districts and to fill their classrooms with the best teachers available.

Getting strong teacher candidates into urban classrooms will depend on reversing the slow-moving hiring processes that turn them away and leave districts to hire from a depleted and far weaker applicant pool.

Hiring Reform: Essential for Closing the Achievement Gap

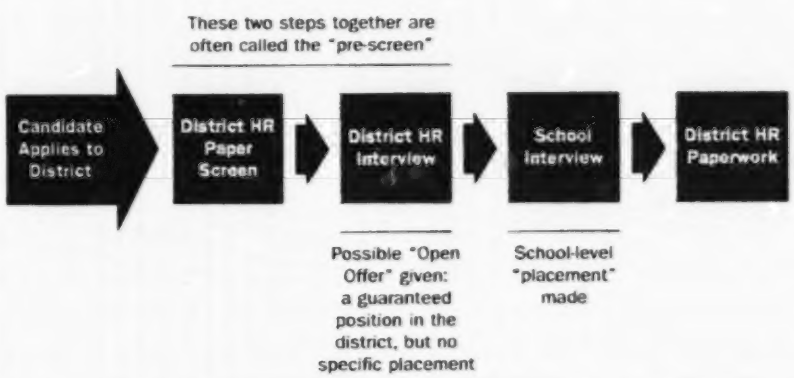
We have seen the same phenomenon of late summer hiring and significant applicant attrition in large urban districts across the country. As high-need urban districts struggle to meet the requirements of the No Child Left Behind law and hire "highly qualified" teachers, they must understand that their yearly ritual of staffing schools with whomever remains in the applicant pool at the summer's end is not inevitable. Academically stronger and better-prepared teacher candidates want to teach in these districts, including in the highest-need schools. Getting them into the classrooms, however, will depend on reversing the slow-moving, half-paralyzed hiring processes that effectively turn them away and leave districts to hire from a depleted and far weaker applicant pool.

The good news is that late urban teacher hiring is a solvable problem. Of course, high-need schools require multiple reforms to close the achievement gap. Nonetheless, given the strong and proven connection between high-quality teachers and student achievement, when urban districts make the changes necessary to hire—rather than lose—their best teacher candidates, we believe they will be making one of the wisest investments they can toward improving outcomes for children.

A Primer on the Typical Urban District Hiring Process

The districts studied in this report followed a hiring process similar to that of most large urban districts. Teachers (both new and experienced) apply for a position in the district through the central human resources department (HR). Upon receiving an application, HR staff members screen the submitted materials and decide whether to invite the applicant for a district interview. Typically, central HR staff members conduct the interviews; sometimes principals and teachers participate as well. Candidates who pass the district "pre-screen" are considered worthy of hire. They are referred to principals for a school-level interview and a specific school placement. Once a principal has decided to hire a particular candidate, central HR processes the final paperwork, including a background check and contract.[7]

Typical Hiring Process in a Large Urban District


These two steps together are often called the "pre-screen"
Candidate Applies to District
District HR Paper Screen
District HR Interview
School Interview
District HR Paperwork
Possible "Open Offer" given: a guaranteed position in the district, but no specific placement
School-level "placement" made

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Section 1

What the Data Show:

The real problem in urban teacher hiring

Late Hiring Causes Significant Applicant Attrition

Not Primarily a Recruitment Problem

In the aftermath of the widely publicized need for two million new teachers by 2008, educators and policymakers alike rushed to pass legislation and channel additional resources to new teacher recruitment.[8]

"The timeline is what made me decide not to pursue a position [with you]. It got to be the beginning of school [and] I ended up taking another offer, but this was the one that I wanted."
—Special education applicant

Through our partnerships with urban districts to recruit and hire high-quality certified teachers, The New Teacher Project has seen that effective recruiting, while very important, alone will not overcome the shortage of such teachers in higher-poverty districts. If our nation is serious about upgrading the effectiveness of urban teachers, it must revamp the entire teacher hiring process.

It is true that most district recruitment efforts need to be significantly improved. Districts must launch proactive recruitment efforts far earlier in the year. They must selectively target education schools and other nontraditional sources of high-quality applicants and draw on current teachers and principals to serve as part-time recruiters. They must also communicate compelling messages, talk openly about the challenges of teaching in high-needs schools and issue early invitations to candidates to meet teachers and principals at the hardest-to-staff schools and hear firsthand about their experiences.

The commitment by the four districts studied here to improve their recruitment strategies enabled each of them to attract hundreds and even thousands of applicants.

For example, in 2002:

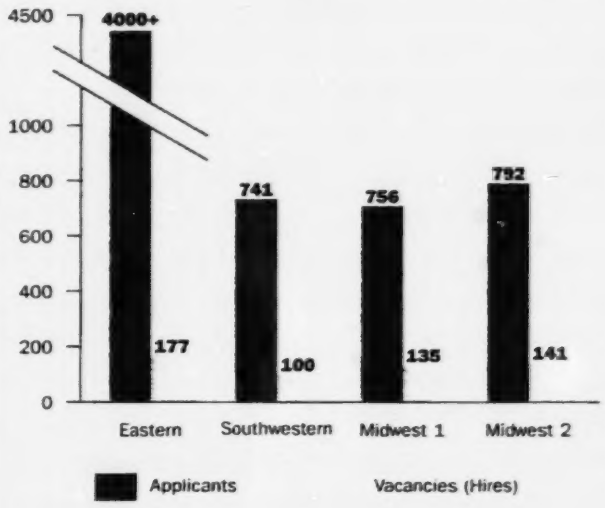
- The Eastern District received 4,000 applications for fewer than 200 spots.
- In two "hard-to-staff" Midwestern Districts ("Midwestern District 1" and "Midwestern District 2"), there were 5.6 times as many applicants as openings.
- The Southwestern District attracted more than 700 applications for a special program to fill 100 shortage-area vacancies in hard-to-staff schools.[9] (See fig. 1.)

Just as important, hundreds of these candidates had applied to teach in one of the high-need areas of math, science, special education, bilingual education or English as a Second Language:

- In the Eastern District, more than 230 applicants—or 38 percent of the applicants who successfully passed the district's initial screening and interview—were for a shortage-area position.[10]
- In the Southwestern District, more than 250 applicants—or 37 percent of the total number of applicants—were certified to teach in a shortage area.
- Close to 140 applicants to Midwestern District 1, or more than one-fifth (21 percent) of the total applicant pool, were for shortage-area positions.
- Midwestern District 2 had more than 160 certified, shortage-area applicants—close to one-fourth (24 percent) of its total applicant pool.

However, even though these districts started the hiring process with many more applicants than vacancies to fill, each of them had to scramble at the 11th hour to fill its vacancies.

Fig. 1: Teacher Applicants vs. Vacancies



Source: Applicant tracking databases.

The Real Problem: Late Urban District Hiring Timelines

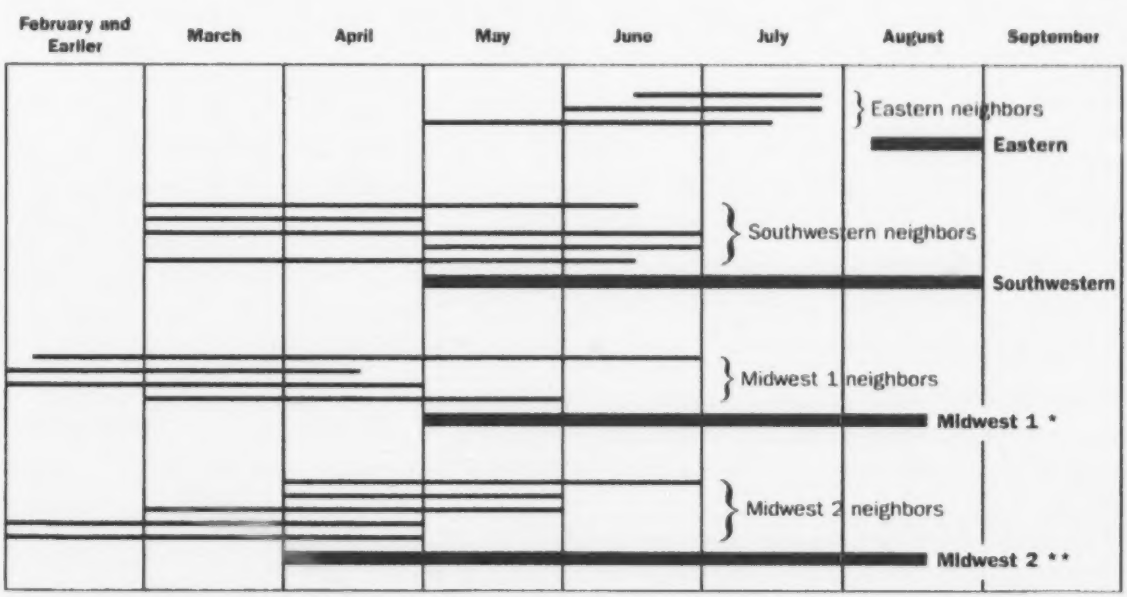
The reason for this unlikely problem is that these districts were not focused on creating a swiftly moving hiring system. We observed that their staffing challenges had far less to do with the lack of interested, qualified candidates and far more to do with their untimely and inefficient hiring processes.

Specifically, each of these "hard-to-staff" urban districts failed to make job offers to new teachers until mid-to-late summer, leaving their applicants in limbo for months, not knowing if or where they would teach. To be fair, each district recognized that its hiring system required improvements and

welcomed efforts to raise the quality of its new teachers. Nevertheless, the bulk of their hiring continued to occur at the end of the summer:

- In the Eastern District, although application submissions peaked in March and a pool of 600 applicants had successfully passed a screening by the end of May, not a single teacher was hired until mid-August.
- In the Southwestern District, candidates certified in the high-need areas of math, science, special education, and bilingual education waited almost three months from application to contract signing.
- In Midwestern District 1, in August, when a majority of the hiring took place, more than one-third (35 percent) of those candidates waiting for a principal interview had been waiting four months. Meanwhile, four in 10 (43 percent) had been waiting more than two-and-a-half months.
- In Midwestern District 2, almost half of the job offers to new teachers were made in July and August, with close to one-third of the offers coming in August.

Fig. 2: Hiring Timelines for Sample Districts vs. Neighbors



Note: Beginning and end dates show the month hiring begins (placements offered) and when majority of hiring is completed.
* 3% of hires completed before May.
** 5% of hires completed before April.
Source: Interviews with neighboring districts, Applicant tracking databases.

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The hiring timelines of these four districts starkly contrasted with those of surrounding districts, which made offers earlier in the spring and completed the bulk of their hiring by early summer. By the time the Eastern District made its first hires in August, its neighboring districts had completed most of their hiring. Similarly, three of the neighbors to Midwestern District 1 had hired most of their new teachers by the end of May, and a fourth neighbor had done so in June—yet Midwestern District 1 hired 66 percent of its new teachers after July 22nd and more than half (55 percent) after August 6th. As one candidate in the Eastern District explained, "The hiring process took too long. By the time I was able to schedule a first interview...I already had four other interviews and offers." (See fig. 2.)

A Large Number of Applicants Leave the Hiring Process

In all four districts, substantial numbers of applicants dropped out of the hiring process, accepting jobs in districts that hired earlier.[11] Moreover, the later a district hired, the more applicants it lost. (See figs. 3 and 4.)

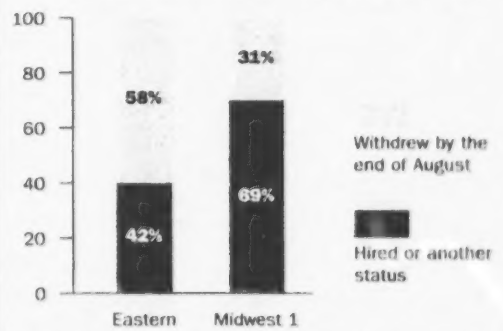
- In the Eastern District, which did not make a single job offer until August 12, almost three out of five (58 percent) of the "pre-screened-in" applicants withdrew before the end of the summer.
- Midwestern District 1 saw more than 30 percent of its best candidates leave the hiring process after they had been selected for interviews with principals. Early applicants left in higher numbers: More than one-third (35 percent) of those who applied by the end of May withdrew.[12]
- The Southwestern District gave its most desirable applicants nonbinding "open offers," in which the district expressed its intention, but no guarantee, to hire them once a school assignment had been found. Later, more than one-third (35 percent) who had accepted these terms withdrew.

Many Applicants Leave Because of Hiring Delays

In district after district, applicants indicated that late hiring timelines caused them to take jobs in districts that made earlier offers. For example:

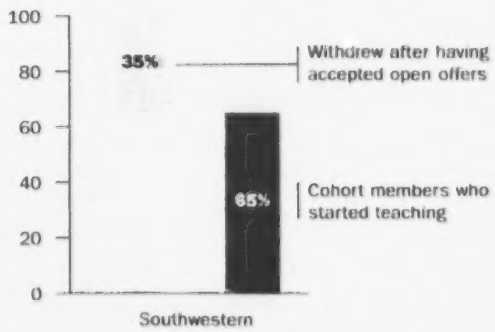
- In the Eastern District, where no teachers were hired before mid-August, two-thirds (66 percent) of those who withdrew blamed the late timeline.

Fig. 3: Withdrawal Rate of Pre-screened Candidates Eastern and Midwestern 1 Districts



Note: Represents the known withdrawers and the portion of applicants of unknown status who in fact withdrew. Total number pre-screened by end of June was 692 in Eastern District and 144 in Midwest 1 District.
Source: Telephone and e-mail surveys, Applicant tracking databases.

Fig. 4: Percent of Applicants Who Withdrew from Cohort After Accepting Offers Southwestern District



Note: Open offers expressed an intention to hire, not a guarantee of employment.
Source: Applicant tracking database.

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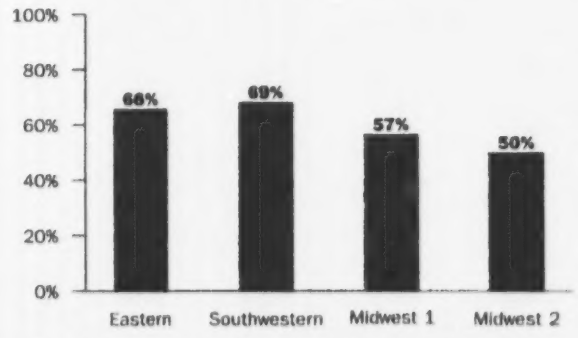
- In the Southwestern District, nearly seven out of 10 (69 percent) of those who opted out of the process blamed hiring delays.
- The late timeline was a factor for close to three out of five (57 percent) of withdrawers in Midwestern District 1.
- At least half of Midwestern District 2's withdrawers left because "the offer came too late." (See fig. 5.)

"You were a district that I had strongly considered," one applicant to Midwestern District 2 wrote in an anonymous survey, "but your timeline was too slow to allow me to wait for the decision and...prepare for a new school year." Another explained, "I accepted a position with another district but if an offer from [you] had come first, that would have been my preference."

Importantly, one of the most commonly assumed reasons for applicants' withdrawals—salary—was cited by relatively few withdrawers. It figured as a factor for 13 percent of withdrawers in Midwestern District 2, 17 percent in Midwestern District 1, and 24 percent in the Eastern District. Salary was cited by only two percent of the Southwestern District's withdrawers when they were asked about their decision to withdraw. These numbers contrast sharply with the number of applicants who blamed hiring timelines for their withdrawal.

Fig. 5: Percent of Withdrawers for whom Late Timelines Were a Factor in Their Decision to Leave



Source: Telephone and e-mail surveys in Eastern District (sample=94) and Midwestern District 1 (sample=58); Exit interviews in Southwestern District (sample=54); Written withdrawer survey in Midwestern District 2 (sample=24). (For Eastern and Midwestern 1 Districts, includes all who said that the hiring timeline was "somewhat" or "very" important in their decision not to pursue a position, or they would have accepted an offer from the district if it had come at the same time as the offer they ultimately accepted. For Midwestern District 2, includes all who give "offer came too late" as a reason. Southwestern District results are those who cited placement or paperwork delays as the main reason in their decision to withdraw.)

Districts Lose Candidates Who Otherwise Would Have Taught There

Especially within urban district HR departments, it is commonly assumed that the candidates who withdraw never seriously intended to teach in an urban district but applied simply to hedge their bets. Our data show that this assumption is false. Despite the difficulties and delays the withdrawers to the Eastern District and Midwestern District 1 experienced, four out of five stated that they would still like to be considered again for a teaching position in the district from which they withdrew.[13] In addition, although roughly four of five withdrawers accepted teaching positions in other districts, close to half said that they would have "definitely" or "probably" accepted an offer from the district if it had come first. (See fig. 6.)

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One special education teacher explained, "The timeline is what made me decide not to pursue a position [in the Eastern District] ... it got to be the beginning of school, and I had to have a job! I ended up taking another offer that came along, but this was the one that I wanted."

Why it Matters: The Best Applicants Are the Ones Who Leave

Unfilled vacancies

Unfilled vacancies—a pervasive problem for urban districts—are the first and most visible consequence of late hiring timelines. The four districts studied in this report are reflective of what happens in similar districts nationwide. Even though these districts received far more applicants than they needed, none of them opened the school year fully staffed.

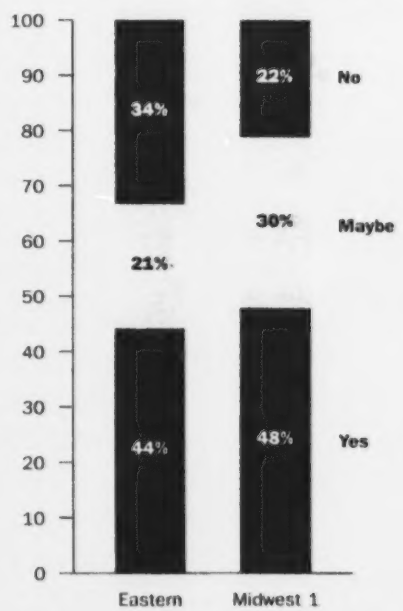
The Eastern District, for example, had 15 outstanding vacancies on the first day of school, despite having received more than 4,000 applications. Just five days before school began, Midwestern District 1 posted 60 vacancies, 54 of which were ultimately filled by substitutes. Midwestern District 2 had 19 vacancies on the first day of school. We know that even higher vacancy rates often are the reality in urban districts, particularly if permanent substitutes are considered.[14] The scramble in late August to fill positions, when there are fewer good teachers to choose from and less time to do so, cannot compensate for the failure to act earlier.[15]

Districts lose high-demand, shortage-area applicants

Even if a school district manages to fill its vacancies by the first day of school, this only serves to mask the more insidious consequences of late hiring. First, by failing to hire earlier in the spring, each district lost the very teachers it needed most—those able to teach in the shortage areas of math, science, special education, and education for English Language Learners.

Of the total known withdrawers in the Eastern District and Midwestern District 2, 37 percent and 55 percent respectively had applied to teach in a shortage area. Nearly seven in 10 (69

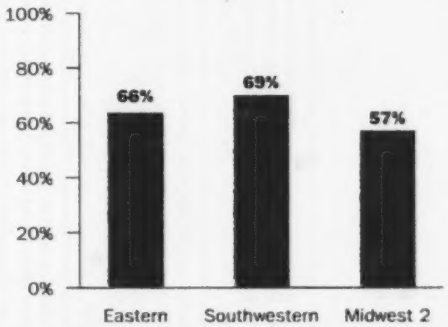
Fig. 6: Withdrawers Responses to the Question, "Would you have accepted an offer from the District if you had received it at the same time that you received your other offer?"



Source: Telephone and e-mail surveys in Eastern District (sample=50) and Midwestern District 1 (sample=46).

percent) of the applicants who withdrew from the Southwestern District's program to hire high-needs teachers for hard-to-staff schools were certified in the District's critical need areas.[16] As the most sought-after teacher candidates nationwide, it is not surprising that shortage-area candidates represented such a large portion of each district's withdrawers. (See fig. 7.)

Fig. 7: Percent of Withdrawers Who Had Applied to Teach in a Critical Shortage Area



Source: Applicant tracking databases. The shortage areas counted were math, science, special education, and education for English Language Learners.

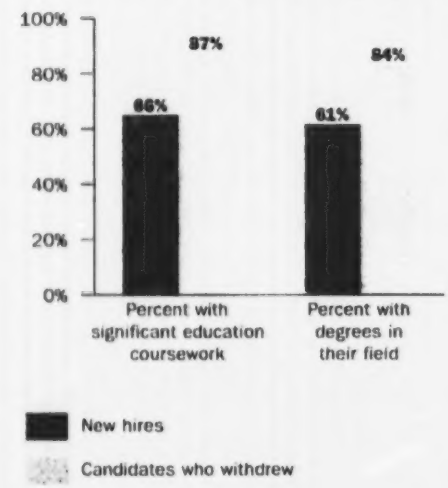
Districts lose stronger candidates and hire weaker ones

Perhaps the most serious consequence of late hiring is that schools lose the stronger candidates and end up hiring the weaker ones. In the field, it is no secret that you have to hire early to get the best teachers. One suburban HR director who hires most candidates by April explains, "If you're not quick, you're dead. To get the best candidates, you have to be out there very early." In another district that hires the majority of its candidates in late spring, a recruiter told us that she wants to move her district's hiring schedule even earlier because she "can't get enough good candidates in May."

Our data demonstrate that these instincts are correct: hiring timelines directly impede a district's ability to hire the most promising teacher candidates. In the Eastern District, we were able to quantify this effect by analyzing in detail the applications of withdrawers and hires. Our findings confirm that, according to several important criteria—undergraduate GPA, degree in the teaching field, and education coursework—applicants who subsequently withdrew from the process were, on average, of higher quality than those eventually hired by the Eastern District:

- Withdrawers had significantly higher undergraduate GPAs than did the district's hires (3.21 verses 2.96).[17]
- Withdrawers were 40 percent more likely to have a degree in their respective teaching fields than were the district's hires.[18]
- Withdrawers were significantly more likely to have had coursework in education than were the district's hires.[19] (See fig. 8.)

Fig. 8: Quality Comparison of New Hires and Withdrawers in the Eastern District



Note: Both of these differences are statistically significant (p<.01).
Source: TNTP file analysis in Eastern District, May 2003 (Degrees in Field samples: hires=142, withdrawers=153; Significant education coursework samples: hires=119, withdrawers=147).

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Meanwhile, there was no statistically significant difference between the two groups in years of experience.[20] We expect that analyses of other urban districts would show a similar pattern.

The reason for these results is obvious. Like shortage-area candidates, higher-achieving individuals have multiple options, often including job offers from suburban districts that hire earlier in the spring. The demand for these candidates, in fact, has only increased in light of the No Child Left Behind requirements that all schools have highly qualified teachers by the 2005-06 school year. Chances are slim that candidates like these—even those interested in teaching in an urban district—will turn down other offers to wait until August (and risk unemployment) to learn whether they will have jobs in September.

Therefore, although all four urban districts received large numbers of highly qualified applicants willing and able to teach in their schools, each district ended up struggling to fill its classrooms from a depleted and weakened applicant pool, just weeks or days before school started.

Linking Teacher Characteristics to Student Achievement

Despite the general agreement on the impact teachers have on student learning, the literature linking specific teacher characteristics to student achievement is contentious and murky. Nevertheless, a few points of general agreement have emerged. Most observers believe that a teacher's verbal ability, as measured on a standardized test, is a good, and perhaps the best, predictor of teacher effectiveness at raising student achievement.[21] Content knowledge and content-specific pedagogy seem to be linked to student achievement.[22] And most experts agree that having at least one or two years of teaching experience is linked to student achievement.[23]

Obviously, a district cannot assess each of these specific indicators for all withdrawers and every new hire. We have, however, been able to collect data that can stand as proxies for the characteristics listed above. These include: undergraduate GPA (which has been correlated to verbal ability, the best known predictor of teacher quality),[24] having a major or minor in the prospective teaching field (a good proxy for content knowledge), and having significant educational coursework. (Although many question the link between pedagogy coursework and student learning, it is imperative for standard certification in the states examined here and is therefore necessary to meet the requirements of the No Child Left Behind legislation.) We have been able to measure years of teaching experience directly.

For the first three of these indicators (GPA, having a major or minor in the teaching field, and having significant education coursework), we found that, on average, the withdrawers scored significantly higher than did the new hires ($p<.01$ in each case). On the fourth, years of experience, the difference between the two groups was insignificant ($p>1$).

Section 2

The Causes of Late Hiring Timelines

Flawed and highly bureaucratic hiring systems clearly contributed to the hiring delays in these large urban districts. But these problems were significantly compounded by three hiring policies: late or nonexistent notification requirements for exiting teachers; teachers union transfer requirements that gave existing teachers first pick of openings and created perverse incentives for principals to hide their vacancies until the transfer period was over; and a budget process that left districts unsure as to which positions would be funded. These barriers are not unique to the districts studied here but rather exist in urban districts nationwide.

Flawed and highly bureaucratic hiring systems not only delay timelines but also anger applicants and contribute to their leaving the hiring process.

Dysfunctional Human Resources Practices Contribute to the Hiring Delays, but are not the Sole Cause

The prevalent explanations for late hiring are poor design and execution by district human resources offices: a cumbersome application process, too many layers of bureaucracy, inadequate customer service, poor data systems, and an overall lack of urgency. Many districts do indeed suffer from these problems, which not only delay timelines but also anger applicants and contribute to their withdrawal. While these problems are far from the sole cause of the hiring delays, they must be addressed by most urban school districts.

In one HR department after another, we have seen that the following major dysfunctions undermine effective, efficient, customer-friendly hiring:

Lack of clear hiring goals and accountability: There is no unified vision of what needs to be accomplished to have a successful hiring season, no benchmarks to measure whether the district is on the right track to such an outcome, and no accountability for the results.

Lack of a clearly defined applicant process flow: Many districts lack a defined application process with clear deadlines and steps communicated up front to applicants. While some districts may have a process overview chart or diagram that suggests a clearly defined approach, the typical reality is that exceptions and chaos trump and ultimately obscure any semblance of a clear process.

"If the HR department is unprofessional, it reflects what the schools are going to look like."
—Applicant who left urban hiring process in July

Insufficient systems to track applicants and vacancies: The absence of strong systems to track applicants, vacancies, and transfers severely compromises the ability of many large urban districts to predict vacancies, improve the application flow, make strategic decisions, and hold staff accountable. At any point in the year, many districts cannot tell you how many applicants they have or describe applicant characteristics. They may not be able to answer requests by individual applicants because they cannot find the application. And they cannot do an analysis of past trends or project vacancies because they lack the data.

Poor customer service and insufficient communication: The absence of a clearly defined hiring process, clear-cut timelines, and applicant tracking systems has a predictable effect on applicants. They rarely receive timely information or have a clear expectation as to what will happen next. These problems are only compounded when applicants are subject to rudeness or indifference on the phone or in person, are left waiting in district offices, or are required to jump through bureaucratic hoops.

Insufficient attention to HR staffing: Problems with customer service are often an outgrowth of the inattention paid by many districts to HR staffing structures and quality. Failing to ensure that all district employees who interact with external applicants are goal-oriented and customer-focused exacerbates problems of converting applicants into hires. So does a human resources department that lacks clear and rational staff roles and an effective leader to set the vision and ensure accountability for results.

Undoubtedly, applicants are frustrated by the customer service they receive. Although only eight percent of withdrawers in Midwestern District 2 and 13 percent in Midwestern District 1 cited poor customer service as a factor in their decision to leave the hiring process, it was identified as a factor by 37 percent of the Eastern District's withdrawers. As one Eastern District applicant who left in July explained: "If the HR department is unprofessional, it reflects what the schools are going to look like."

Surrounding the administrative dysfunctions is a web of policy barriers that would stymie the efforts of even the most competent HR staff to hire earlier and more effectively.

Principals, too, are frustrated by inefficiencies at the central human resources office. A principal in the Southwestern District told us that, after telling HR that she has decided to hire a candidate, "I have to dog them. I call them every day and write e-mails. 'Did you get this?' 'What's happening?' ... A million things get lost." A principal from the Eastern District told a similar story of "paperwork drag": "HR drags ... Once I've interviewed a person, I will walk his paperwork there myself."

Clearly, for urban districts to hire high-quality teachers consistently, they must fix their dysfunctional hiring processes. But it will not be enough to address these process inefficiencies. Surrounding the administrative dysfunctions is a web of policy barriers that would stymie the efforts of even the most competent HR staff to hire earlier and more effectively.

Three Policy Barriers to Timely Hiring

In district after district, we have seen three policy barriers, mainly outside the control of HR departments, at the core of the late hiring cycles that cause urban districts to lose the strongest candidates:

1. *Vacancy notification requirements*
2. *Teachers union transfer requirements*
3. *Budget timelines and enrollment uncertainties*

1. Vacancy notification requirements

In many districts, it is hard to determine vacancies in a timely way because teachers intending to retire or resign need not declare their plans until summer or the new school year. Even where notification deadlines exist, they are often too late to facilitate early hiring. They are rarely enforced and have minimal potential penalties.

In different districts, any combination of local teachers union contracts, city code, or state law can govern the requirements for notification by departing teachers. All of the districts studied in this report were hampered by late or nonexistent notification requirements:

District	State Notification Requirement	District or Contract Notification Requirement
Eastern	At least 10 days before the effective date of resignation. However, this is rarely enforced.	none
Southwestern	45 days before the beginning of school. One principal told us that she returns from vacation in late July to find more vacancies.	none
Midwestern District 1	June 1. Teachers who notify later are often granted exemptions.	none
Midwestern District 2	May 15, but rarely enforced.	none

Not only are deadlines insufficient; departing teachers who voluntarily notify early also may be penalized by the loss of health benefits or summer teaching opportunities. As a result, teachers often wait until the last possible moment to tell the district that they will be leaving, and administrators are left in the dark about which vacancies will exist at the beginning of school.

2. Teachers union transfer requirements

Once school vacancies are identified, teacher transfer requirements further prevent timely new teacher hiring. Collective bargaining agreements typically give teachers who want to leave their schools, or whose positions have been eliminated, the right to transfer to another school before any teacher from outside the system can be hired. Only after this time-consuming transfer process ends can new hiring begin.[25]

a. In large urban districts, transfers take too long and end too late

For large urban school districts, the transfer process often extends well into the summer, long after surrounding suburban districts have completed their hiring. Administrative inefficiencies clearly lengthen these processes, as do cumbersome transfer requirements: District administrators spend months sorting out transfer requests, arranging school-level interviews, and placing transferring teachers in one of their top-choice schools. Schools often must interview each transfer applicant.

Timetables provided in union contracts and local laws also undermine expedited transfer processes. For example, in the Eastern District, teachers can request voluntary transfers until May 30, and HR need not grant or deny any transfer request until August 31. There is a similar transfer timetable for involuntary transfers. In Midwestern District 1, the union contract allows voluntary transfers to drag from April 1 to June 30. There is no cutoff date at all for involuntary transfers. Other large districts have similarly late transfer timelines.

There are many ways to structure a transfer process, and the design can determine whether it has an adverse effect on the timing, and therefore the quality, of teachers hired. When transfers begin late and last months, and the process halts all hiring by law, districts simply cannot hire new teachers in a timely manner.

When teacher transfers begin late and last months, and the process halts all hiring by law, districts simply cannot hire new teachers in a timely manner.

How the Transfer Process Works

Although it is difficult to generalize across thousands of districts because the process is governed by local teachers union contracts, typically there are two types of transferring teachers: voluntary and involuntary. Voluntary transfers are teachers who want to leave their schools. Involuntary transfers—sometimes called "excessed teachers"—are those whose positions have been eliminated.

Sometime in the spring, teaching positions that will be vacant in the coming year are listed on a transfer posting. Transferring teachers can "bid" for vacant positions in their area, often in order of seniority. In most situations, schools are required to take one of the transferring teachers who apply to fill a vacancy.

Meanwhile, all hiring district-wide is postponed until the transfer process ends. In fact, union contracts typically specify that no teacher can be hired from outside of the system, including experienced teachers from other districts, until all transferring teachers receive a job in some school in the district. Even if there is no transfer applicant for a job, the district may be unable to open the position to external candidates until the transfer process is completed.

b. Forcing transferring teachers on schools creates additional delays by making principals reluctant to post vacancies and interview

Most transfer systems exert a far greater negative toll on hiring than the months they take to complete. It is not uncommon to see principals resist HR requests to announce their vacancies, as well as to interview and make offers to applicants. Indifference certainly drives the unresponsiveness of some principals. Many principals, however, have told us that they hide their vacancies and drag their feet on interviewing candidates sent by HR for fear they will be forced to hire a teacher they do not want—whether a transferring teacher or one new to the system.

As discussed above, in most districts the union contract requires principals to take involuntarily transferring teachers if there are vacancies in the building that match the teachers' certification areas. Many districts have similar requirements for voluntary transfers. In some districts, these requirements have been modified somewhat in recent years by allowing principals to consider the qualifications and professional preparation of transfer applicants in addition to their seniority. Nevertheless, most union contracts still require a school to give the job to one of the transfer applicants even if an external applicant is more qualified.

Sometimes transferring teachers displace less-senior teachers from their positions—regardless of the principal's preferences. Furthermore, there is a widespread perception that many involuntary transfers are being forced from their current schools for disciplinary reasons or for nonperformance as a short-cut to a lengthy formal termination process.

The only way for principals to avoid unwanted transfers is to hide their vacancies. In the Eastern District, for example, one principal told us that she resists disclosing her vacancies to the district in order to avoid "everybody's mess … Then, at a certain point [after transfers are completed], we might say, 'Oh, look, I

School Reconstitution and Transfers

School reconstitution—recreating a school staff anew, often under a new principal—is commonly seen as a valuable reform strategy for turning around a chronically low-performing school. What is not recognized is that the timing of school reconstitutions can severely undermine a district's ability to hire the best teachers. When the Eastern District announced school reconstitutions in June, the human resources fallout was extensive. The terms of the union agreement guaranteed other district positions to all displaced teachers, according to a strict seniority calculus, before new teachers could be hired. Displaced teachers also had the right to reapply and interview at their previous schools; whenever teachers were rehired, however, they gave up their transfer slots and set off a domino-like chain reaction for all other transfers, which had to be shuffled according to seniority. Finding positions for all of the teachers took many weeks. From June to mid-July—a critical time for making offers to new teachers, and before even a single new hire was made—all external hiring was put on hold.

System-wide Layoff Requirements: An Additional Barrier to Earlier Hiring

Transfer requirements are not the only collective bargaining issue that significantly delays new teacher hiring. Although we did not see the full effect of union layoff and displacement policies in our prior work with districts, looming state deficits have now made teacher layoffs a reality—and a significant barrier to earlier hiring—in many large urban districts.

A governing principle of union requirements is that layoffs of teachers must occur in reverse seniority order by certification area across all schools in a district. So when a reduction-in-force is necessary, the teachers who lose their jobs are the least senior people district-wide in the subject area facing cuts. If the schools losing junior teachers are not the ones needing to cut back their staff, they will have vacancies which must be filled by more senior teachers from other schools whose positions have been cut. The filling of vacancies of displaced persons—often perceived as "bumping"—typically is based on seniority alone.

Like transfer requirements, seniority-driven layoff and displacement decisions delay hiring in multiple ways.

Like transfer requirements, seniority-driven layoffs and displacement decisions delay hiring in multiple ways:

- These requirements pose another time-consuming administrative burden for HR, and union contracts often preclude any new hiring until layoffs are resolved.
- It becomes more difficult to predict vacancies because a district must understand the ripple effects of system-wide layoffs across all of its schools.
- Widespread layoff notices used to protect against the unforeseeable results of system-wide displacements affect not only the motivation and commitment of young teachers in the system but also the interest of prospective teachers.
- Forcing schools to hire and retain teachers based on considerations of seniority rather than commitment and qualifications can aggravate their unwillingness to publicize vacancies, interview candidates, or work collaboratively with HR.

have a vacancy.' Most of us do that, we wait. We don't tell HR until later in July." Another principal in the district concurred: "I don't advertise my vacancies; I keep them to myself."

Not only do principals not trust HR with transfers; they also worry that HR has not recruited the best possible new teacher candidates for their schools. They are aware that when they receive candidates from HR late in the summer, they are less likely to be as good as early candidates. In May, one Eastern District principal said that nearby districts had a head start in hiring, noting, "District X [near the Eastern District] is having their second fair on Saturday. We haven't had one yet—they will get everyone." A frustrated principal in Midwestern District 1 similarly complained, "[By] August, it seems the candidate pool has been picked over."

Transfer requirements often lead to a counterproductive cat-and-mouse game: principals "lie low" with their vacancies, while HR tries to force them to accept teachers they do not want.

The result is a counterproductive cat-and-mouse game: principals "lie low" with their vacancies and avoid interviewing and offering jobs to candidates sent by HR, while HR tries to force principals to accept transfers and the candidates they have recruited. Meanwhile, hundreds of hard-earned, high-quality applicants—who indicated in focus groups that they want to make early connections with principals and schools—wait indefinitely to meet principals and teachers.

This contrasts sharply with other districts where applicants—benefiting from more supportive transfer requirements—are quickly introduced to principals, shown the classrooms where they will teach, and offered school placements far earlier in the hiring season.

3. Budget timelines and enrollment uncertainties

Even after the transfer process is complete, late budget timelines and chronic budget uncertainties lead districts to further forestall school-level job placements to avoid any risk of overhiring.

a. Late state budgets delay hiring

State budget timelines are a major source of the budget delay and uncertainty. In 46 states, the fiscal year does not end until June 30th, and even then, states may not need to pass a budget if they seek an extension.[26] Once a state passes its budget, it also has the option of coming back and cutting the budget more—a common occurrence during the summer. Since poor districts are more dependent on state and federal funds than are wealthier districts, their hiring processes are far more affected by state budget timelines. For large urban districts that may receive 50 percent or more of their school funds from state coffers, even in the best of times state funding uncertainties can significantly impact the overall budget and budgeting processes. The current budget shortfalls across states further complicate the efforts of these districts to make basic hiring assumptions.

In 46 states, the fiscal year does not end until June 30th, and even then, states may not need to pass a budget if they seek an extension.

b. Enrollment fluctuations magnify uncertainty

Since both district and school allocations are determined by student enrollment, enrollment fluctuations are another source of uncertainty, making it harder to pin down budget allocations and hire earlier. Large urban areas with high student mobility are particularly prone to significant enrollment changes. The problem is heightened by the lack of strong systems to carefully track student movement and to monitor major activities that influence enrollment.

c. Counterproductive district responses

Many high-need urban districts react to this uncertainty by delaying the release of school-level budgets and corresponding staffing plans. This strategy has a severe impact on new teacher hiring. Without a staffing plan, or the go-ahead to start hiring, principals cannot commit to the best candidates before they accept jobs with other districts.

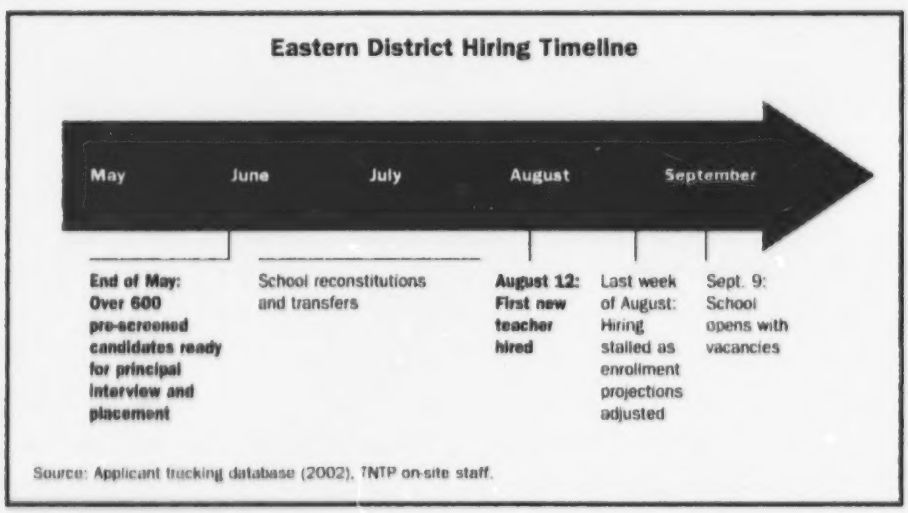
A second frequent-but-counterproductive strategy for dealing with budget uncertainties is to impose an across-the-board hiring freeze. This is a common response both to bad budget news and to evidence that prior enrollment projections were significantly off and needed to be adjusted. In Midwestern District 1, for example, schools received preliminary staffing plans by April, but hiring freezes kept principals from acting until the district felt confident that the budgets were correct. As one principal in the Eastern District laughs: "We know, and then it is frozen."

Furthermore, in times of significant budget cutbacks, even when a staffing plan has been determined, hiring may be further delayed if layoffs are necessary. As said above, in the event of layoffs, more senior teachers whose positions have been eliminated by budget cuts must be placed in other schools before job offers can be made to new teachers.

Although each school system exhibits a slightly different version of these barriers, the same causes show up time and time again. As case studies of the Eastern District and Midwestern District 1 show, different combinations of these factors still add up to lengthy delays for good applicants.

Section 3

Case Studies of Two Districts


Eastern District Hiring Timeline
May
June
July
August
September
End of May: Over 600 pre-screened candidates ready for principal interview and placement
School reconstitutions and transfers
August 12: First new teacher hired
Last week of August: Hiring stalled as enrollment projections adjusted
Sept. 9: School opens with vacancies
Source: Applicant tracking database (2002), TNTP on-site staff.

The Eastern District: Hiring is delayed until August, and many of the best applicants leave.

The Eastern District is a prototypical urban district. Often cited as an example of the woes that have beset urban education, it has struggled for years with teacher vacancies, under-qualified staff, and bureaucratic difficulties.

Contrary to conventional wisdom, however, in 2002 the district was able to attract more than enough applicants to meet its needs. Thanks to aggressive recruitment

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efforts, applications rose steadily through the spring, and by the end of the hiring season, more than 4,000 individuals had applied for fewer than 200 positions. With more than 22 applicants for every position—and 600 applicants successfully pre-screened by the end of May—staffing schools with high-quality teachers should not have been a problem.

But the district did not hire a single new teacher until mid-August. By the end of August, almost three out of five "pre-screened-in" applicants had left the process, and administrators had far fewer options for filling their vacancies with high-quality teachers.

Vacancy notifications

How did a recruitment season that had looked so promising go wrong? The first problem was an information blackout on which positions would be available. With only 10 days' notice, teachers in the district can leave at any time, including after school begins. They are not required to give notice or sign a renewal contract by a particular date. In fact, teachers who notify the district in the spring of their intention to leave are at a *disadvantage*: They lose health benefits for the summer months and are deprioritized for summer school positions. Not surprisingly, departing teachers resist telling principals or central HR, which means that administrators do not know which positions will be available for new hires.

By May, 600 applicants had been pre-screened and were ready for hiring, but not a single new teacher was hired before mid-August.

Transfer requirements and principal reluctance

Even principals who know of vacancies generally do not inform HR for fear they will be forced to take transferring teachers against their will. "We have to tell them if someone is retiring, but if someone is getting married [and plans to leave the district], I say goodbye, and don't tell anyone that I have the vacancy," explained one principal.

Principals kept silent during an extended round of teacher transfers, which had to be completed before any new hiring could start. First, there was the annual excessing process in which teachers whose positions were cut had to be placed in all known vacancies. Then, in June, the Eastern District's superintendent announced that several schools would be reconstituted. Although district administrators were trying to make the right instructional move, the reconstitution initiative further extended the transfer period. Under the agreement with the teachers union, all staff from the reconstituted schools—more than 250 instructional personnel—had the right to transfer to another school on the basis of seniority, certification, and individual preference, and no new teachers could be hired until every single teacher had a position. While the transfers

dragged on for two months, applicants were forced to wait in limbo through the end of July. By that time, 73 percent of that season's withdrawers had abandoned the process to accept positions elsewhere.

The failure of open offers

The Eastern District tried to compensate for its lack of knowledge about specific vacancies by offering its best candidates "open contracts," which guaranteed them jobs in the district and promised that school-level placements would come over the summer. Most candidates were not satisfied. "I couldn't accept a job without details," explained one candidate who withdrew.

By the time transfers and budgets were completed, 58% of candidates had left; these withdrawers had higher GPAs and were 40% more likely to have degrees in their field than were ultimate hires.

Budget uncertainties

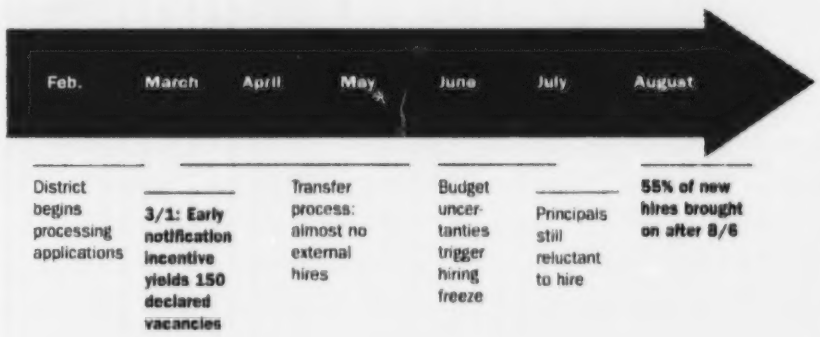
Finally, in August, budget uncertainties struck as projected student enrollment changed. Hiring began fitfully and then stalled during a "leveling" round. Positions were reassigned based on new projections, and teachers whose positions had been eliminated had the right to available vacancies.

Consequences

When the dust had settled, just days before school started, administrators scrambled to fill their vacancies from the ever-dwindling pool of candidates. 58 percent of the candidates had left, and 66 percent of withdrawers cited the timeline as a reason for their withdrawal. Moreover, the district ended up losing the teachers they needed most: high-need applicants and applicants who were academically stronger and better prepared than the ultimate hires. The withdrawers' GPAs were higher; they were also significantly more likely to have degrees in their teaching field and to have completed education coursework.

One applicant who applied to teach math in the Eastern District but then withdrew his application captures the toll of the district's hiring season: "I was called by a number of the district's schools to come in for interviews and, in one case, to start without even being interviewed, on the weekend before school started in September. By then I had taken a professorship in quantitative methods at ____ University on July 10. I would have preferred to be teaching math in the district's schools. I hope you are able to speed up the hiring process, because lots of folks like me who want to teach will have other jobs by the time they are offered one by [the Eastern District.]"

Midwestern District 1 Hiring Timeline



Source: Applicant tracking database (2002); TNTP on-site staff; telephone surveys of HR Directors in surrounding districts.

Midwestern District 1: Despite Early Notification of Vacancies, the District Hires Late Because of Transfers and Budget Freezes.

Midwestern District 1 had been beset for years with high teacher turnover and low student achievement. Committed to improving its recruitment strategies, it began recruiting earlier, aggressively targeted the top schools of education in the region, used teachers as part-time recruiters and implemented a new applicant tracking system. As a result, the district successfully recruited more than 700 applicants (68 percent of whom were certified) for fewer than 150 vacancies. Then, in a bold attempt to begin hiring earlier, it offered current teachers a $1,000 incentive to notify the district by March 1 of their retirement or departure. The effort resulted in 150 vacancies being identified a full three months before teachers were legally required to provide notification.

By recruiting earlier, aggressively targeting the top regional education schools, and using part-time teacher recruiters, the district recruited over 700 applicants for fewer than 150 vacancies.

Despite these early successes, the district could not hire the majority of its new teachers until late summer. Two-thirds of the vacancies were filled after July 22; more than half of new hires were made in the last three weeks of August.

Although process inefficiencies clearly played some role in this turn of events, far more influential was a set of hiring policies and practices that prevented Midwestern District 1 from making job offers earlier.

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"It seems like there is a shortage of teachers, but they don't act like it. I don't get it." —Applicant to Midwestern District 1

Transfer requirements

Teacher transfer requirements presented the first serious obstacle to timely offers and school placements. Under the teachers union contract, all of the district's open positions at the beginning of the mandated transfer period—including the 150 vacancies resulting from the early notification initiative—were closed to candidates from outside the system while current teachers applied for them. According to the union contract, any vacancy posted after the beginning of the transfer process could be immediately opened to new hires. But the district customarily freezes all hiring until the transfer period ends, in part because the transfer procedures consume administrators' time. This cumbersome process stalled new hiring for two months, until mid-May.

Budget uncertainties

Once the transfers ended, the budget process caused further delays. The district received its budget from the state at the end of May, but the superintendent announced that changes in enrollment and property tax uncertainty could necessitate cuts of up to 20 percent, including among personnel. Even after the board had approved the district's budget at the end of June and principals knew their allocations, the district maintained an across-the-board hiring freeze well into July. Only two new teachers were hired between June 7 and July 15.

Principal reluctance

After the freeze was lifted, many principals, whether on vacation or wary of having unqualified candidates forced into their schools, were not responsive to HR requests to interview applicants and give job offers. Until the last week of August, despite the widespread need for new teachers, principals had followed up with and interviewed no more than 36 percent of the applicants sent to them by their HR department. As one principal lamented, "Once you can hire in August, it seems that the candidate pool has been picked over. Sometimes I prefer to stick with a long-term substitute I know and with whom I have worked."

Consequences

Late job offers left hundreds of applicants hanging in limbo for months, not knowing whether or where they would teach. By August, 35 percent of the applicants waiting for principal interviews had waited more than four months since applying, and 43 percent had waited more than two and a half months. Applicants were mystified. One said, "It seems like there is a shortage of teachers, but they don't act like it. I don't get it." And another noted with exasperation, "You say you need a ton of teachers. I say I'll work in the poorest areas. And you won't hire me?!"

The result of these hiring timelines was a group of confused and demoralized applicants, many of whom left the process, often to accept jobs in neighboring districts. As the table below illustrates, these neighboring districts were able to complete the majority of their hiring two to five months before Midwestern District 1 finished its hiring in August, at least in part because of the nature of their vacancy notification and transfer requirements.

As one certified applicant to Midwestern District 1 described her decision to leave: "I had been offered another position, and I needed to make a decision. Since I hadn't been interviewed by [Midwestern District 1], I decided to take the other job."

Vacancy Notification and Transfer Strategies of Midwestern District 1's Neighbors

Midwestern District 1 and Its Neighbors	How Vacancy Notifications Work	How Transfers Work	When Majority of Hiring is Completed
Neighbor 1	Must notify by April 1; they are planning to move this earlier.	Current teachers request transfers by the end of February. The process is completed by mid-March, and external hires begin then.	April
Neighbor 2	There is an early retirement incentive if retirees notify by Feb. 1.	When vacancies are announced, they are immediately forwarded to all teachers electronically and kept closed to external candidates for three days.	April
Neighbor 3	Retirees must notify by mid-March; resignations must be given by June 1.	The transfer season lasts until July 1, but positions are open to external candidates. Transferring teachers do not have a monopoly on vacancies.	June
Neighbor 4	A $300 incentive is offered if notification is given by Nov. 1.	Positions are immediately posted for all current teachers as they occur, but they are not closed to external hires. Current teachers who apply for a position are guaranteed an interview.	May
Midwestern District 1	Notification is required by June 1, but teachers who notify later are usually granted exemptions. In 2002, there was a trial incentive to notify by March 1.	The transfer season runs from March to mid-May (and potentially as late as early June). Vacancies are closed to external hires until the season ends. School-based committees must take candidates or face grievances.	August

Section 4

Recommendations

Practical solutions for solving the urban teacher challenge

Past efforts to increase the number and quality of new teachers in urban districts have focused on ways to recruit more teachers. As shown in this report, recruitment alone will not be enough to solve the teacher shortage or quality problem. Urban districts must concentrate on changing their hiring rules and timetables so they can convert their best applicants into hires. Only then will they be able to improve the overall quality of the new teachers in their classrooms.

Recruitment, while important, alone will not solve the teacher shortage or quality problem. Urban districts must change their hiring rules and timetables so they can convert their best applicants into hires.

Hire By May 1 to Be Competitive

A number of urban districts have moved up their hiring of new teachers to June or July. While this is an improvement, it is not early enough. Our data indicate that applicants begin leaving in significant numbers in May, and that 40 percent withdraw by the end of June.[27] Moreover, the best candidates are the first to withdraw, accepting offers from districts that typically hire most of their teachers by May.

So how early is early enough? For large urban districts to capitalize on applicant interest and compete with their neighbors for the best talent, we believe they must:

Move toward the goal of completing the vast majority of new teacher hiring by May 1.

During a likely phase-in of these goals, commit to hiring at least 30 percent to 40 percent of new teachers by May 1 and the remainder by June 1.

Provide School-Level Placements, Not Just Open Contracts

For an accelerated timeline to be effective, it must result in school-level placements. Our data show that a more general statement of intent or commitment by a district to hire an applicant—often called an open offer or open contract—will not keep candidates in the hiring process if they lack specific school placements.

Two of the districts we studied, the Eastern and Southwestern Districts, made open offers, but the districts still experienced large attrition rates.[28] Our focus groups with certified teaching candidates and new teachers explain why open offers are not the solution to the timeline problem, at least for harder-to-staff urban districts. Certified teaching candidates are usually education school graduates or experienced teachers. Because of the time they have already spent in the classroom, they are savvy enough to know that the principal for whom they work and the building in which they work will largely define the quality of their experience. In fact, many told us they base their decision solely on rapport with a principal. Moreover, they fear that committing to work before they have received a specific placement may leave them with no control later in the process.[29]

Quality candidates in urban districts want to make a commitment to a specific school. Giving them early school placements —ultimately, by May 1—is the only option for hiring them.

We have seen that more affluent districts may be better able to take advantage of open offers. Applicants' perceptions of what schools will be like in those districts may make them more willing to commit to a spring open contract from such a district even without a specific school placement, giving these districts the flexibility to place candidates as late as June or July.

In large urban districts, however, connecting with specific schools and receiving early school placements may be the one way to alleviate broader concerns prospective teachers may have about teaching in a high-poverty school system. Quality teacher candidates want to make a commitment to a specific school and a specific classroom, not to a district. As a result, providing them with early school placements is the only option for hiring the most promising teacher candidates.

The first three recommendations below address strategies to remove the three policy barriers to earlier hiring, while the fourth describes necessary HR reforms.

RECOMMENDATION 1: Vacancy Notifications

Require resigning or retiring teachers to notify districts far earlier—by March 15 at the latest—and remove disincentives for early notification.

a. Require earlier notification

It will be impossible to move up hiring timelines without knowing vacancies earlier. Collective bargaining contracts and, where necessary, state law must be changed to require teachers to notify districts by March if they plan to resign or retire. Of course, there will always be vacancies that arise during the summer—largely due to unforeseen personal circumstances. Although these are unavoidable, the vast majority of vacancies can and should be announced far earlier.

Collective bargaining contracts and, where necessary, state law must be changed to require teachers to notify districts by March if they plan to resign or retire.

b. Remove notification penalties

Regardless of when resigning or retiring teachers are required to provide notification, they will not do so if they are penalized, for example by the loss of health benefits or summer teaching opportunities. At minimum, all such penalties must be removed, and this must be clearly communicated to teachers.

Implementing Earlier Teacher Notifications: Midwestern District 1's Neighbors

Some districts have successfully moved up notification dates. For example, two districts bordering Midwestern District 1 face the same late deadline from the state (June 1) for teacher notifications. One of these districts pre-empts the state's deadline by offering teachers who plan to leave a payment of $300 if they notify the district by November 1. The Human Resources director says, "Of course things come up later in the year, but on November 2, I know most of my vacancies and can begin hiring for them." The other district has introduced a contract-based policy requiring teachers to give notice by April 1 but is working to move this deadline even earlier: "We need to go to an earlier date because of teacher shortages. We can't get enough good candidates in May," explained a recruiter. These two districts do the majority of their hiring by March and May, respectively.

RECOMMENDATION 2: Teachers Union Transfer Requirements

Move up and expedite transfer processes, and work toward enabling principals and their schools to consider internal and external candidates equally.

a. The short-term: Develop an earlier, shorter transfer process

Hiring and placing new teachers by May 1 means that transfer and "excess" processes must be completed by April 1 at the latest. To achieve this goal, districts must move up the start of the transfer process and limit the number of weeks it can last. When school reconstitutions will lead to significant transfers, they must occur in this same timetable to ensure that reform initiatives do not delay hiring and therefore undermine the quality of the overall teaching force.

b. The longer-term: Work toward enabling principals and their schools to consider equally and extend offers to internal or external teacher candidates

We believe districts will not be able to meet a May 1 hiring deadline without addressing the substance, not just the timing, of teachers union requirements that affect the hiring process.

On the most basic level, even if a large urban district is able to begin the transfer process earlier, it would be very difficult to truly accelerate it without simplifying its often cumbersome requirements. For example, rather than requiring a school to interview each transfer applicant, as do some current union contracts, a school could interview only some of the transfer applicants as long as it reviews each file.

Ultimately, we believe that principals and schools must be empowered to consider external and internal candidates at the same time and hire the best person for the job. There would be numerous benefits to this approach. Most obvious, rather than having to wait to complete the transfer phase of hiring, districts and schools could consider new applicants far earlier in the hiring season. Moreover, principals would be far less motivated to shield vacancies from HR and ignore interview requests because they would retain final authority over staffing. A new transfer approach could also set the stage for improved and more collaborative relationships between HR and schools.

Ultimately, we believe schools must be empowered to consider external and internal candidates at the same time and hire the best person for the job.

The Role of Teachers Unions in Reform

Moving up hiring timelines will require action by many parties, including superintendents, HR staff, and state officials. Teachers unions, however, will play a particularly central role in reform—specifically in the areas of vacancy notifications, transfer processes, and the role of seniority in layoff situations.

Collective bargaining agreements help to ensure that teachers are treated with the fairness and professional respect they deserve. Reforms made to advance new teacher hiring must not compromise the initial impetus for collective bargaining—protection from administrators whose decisions about teachers were as often driven by favoritism or financial considerations as by considerations of merit.

We are concerned, though, that the system is out of balance and that in the interest of protecting more senior teachers, union contracts go too far in the direction of undermining districts' abilities to attract and retain the best new talent. This appears to be particularly true for large urban districts with stronger unions; given their size and administrative complexity, such districts are disproportionately affected in their efforts to hire new teachers by system-wide hiring mandates in their contracts.

We recognize the challenge of achieving union contract reforms, particularly in the area of seniority. Certain phase-in strategies may help create greater collaboration and consensus—e.g., phasing in new rules over a number of years, applying new rules only to new teachers or teachers hired after a certain date, or applying new rules to the hardest-to-staff schools first. Management and labor might also agree to couple seniority concessions with other kinds of benefits for teachers, such as salary increases, better professional development opportunities, or more autonomy in the classroom, when there are demonstrable results.

Fortunately, some teachers unions, including those in urban areas, are beginning to grapple with the quality impact of their contractual mandates. These efforts provide an important opportunity for greater management/union collaboration and the development of new models for reasonable contract modifications that can yield much-needed benefits for teacher quality.

Although beyond the purview of this report, this approach would also benefit school reform more generally by making it much easier for a school to create and maintain a committed and effective school-level instructional team. This goal is derailed when a school is forced to hire a low-performer or even an adequate performer who might just lack the skills or commitment needed to advance the school's educational program or reform initiatives.

We are not advocating the end of all transfers. Teachers who have served a district well deserve fair consideration, and a district should strive to keep its excellent and experienced senior teachers by giving them new opportunities. In many cases, teachers coming through the transfer and excess processes match the needs of a specific vacancy even better than an outside candidate could. For this reason, schools should be required to consider timely transfer requests.

Nevertheless, we believe labor and management should work toward moving decisions about transfer requests to school-level teams. Moreover, schools should have the right to choose the best from all qualified candidates—whether internal or external to the system.

c. Moving toward early and equal consideration of all candidates

We recognize that following this recommendation would be a significant departure from the standard contractual practices of today and that moving in this direction will be difficult for many systems. We believe, however, that thoughtful districts have begun or will begin to move toward this end.

Addressing Union Layoff and Displacement Requirements

Labor and management must also address collective bargaining requirements governing layoffs and displacements so that retrenchment situations do not throw an entire district's hiring into turmoil. Although changing job entitlements in this area will be even harder to achieve than transfer reforms, there are some potential changes that could move districts in the direction of reform.

- Give schools more control over displacement decisions: In an era of higher standards and greater school accountability for results, it will become increasingly important for the hiring and instructional needs of schools, rather than solely strict seniority requirements, to drive layoff and displacement decisions. Even in a layoff situation, schools should have more control over which teachers come to their schools and, at minimum, seniority should not be the sole consideration.

- Continue hiring: Even if there will be layoffs in some certification areas, districts should still aggressively work to hire new teachers in those areas not affected by layoffs. To do this successfully, a district must clearly explain to its applicants that layoffs are in other certification areas and that their own contracts will be honored.

- Aggressively manage the layoff process: As with transfers, districts must administer the layoff process as early and quickly as possible.

Districts can take a number of steps to make progress toward including new hires at an earlier stage of the hiring process and enabling schools to hire the best teacher for a specific vacancy. For example:

- As is already happening in some districts, the role of seniority could be significantly reduced in transfer considerations by giving school-based committees the authority to make decisions on transfer applications, based first on merit and fit for the job. Only if a position remains unfilled at the end of the transfer period would it be filled in accordance with seniority requirements.
- A contract could maintain the priority for involuntary transfers but create hiring parity between voluntary transfers and new hires.
- An identified subset of all of the schools—for example, the hardest-to-staff schools—could be given the ability to choose equally from internal and external candidates to fill their vacancies.
- As an alternative to one long, time-consuming transfer period, districts and unions could agree to a five-day period for internal transfer requests before a vacancy can be opened to new hires.
- A variation on this would be to maintain a short, but clearly defined, period—e.g. one week in the second half of March—during which schools would be required to review transfer applications that they had received and after which all positions would be open equally to external and internal applicants.

RECOMMENDATION 3: Budget Timetable and Forecasting

Promote earlier and more predictable budgets and insulate the hardest-to-staff schools from budget fluctuations.

a. Develop and pass budgets earlier

Earlier hiring depends on districts knowing not only their vacancies, but also whether they will have the money to fill them. More predictable budgets thus are an essential ingredient of earlier hiring.

The best way to achieve this predictability is to move up the actual timetable in which state and local budgets are completed. State legislators and local budget authorities must understand that producing an education budget in late summer has disastrous consequences for urban teacher hiring and must develop strategies to accelerate their education budgets.

b. Become better budget and enrollment forecasters

Short of this, school district staff must work with state and city budget officials to better forecast upcoming budgets, so they can hire even before budgets are finalized. Although this is far easier to achieve in times of expanding rather than contracting budgets, in all economic climates, cultivating contacts and aggressively pursuing revenue information can reduce uncertainty. State budget agencies can play a crucial role in improving forecasts by gathering and disseminating budget developments to districts in real time.

Armed with better revenue and enrollment projections, large urban districts must be willing, even in the face of some uncertainty, to do a significant amount of hiring.

Along with these steps, districts must work to project enrollment figures as early and accurately as possible. The districts doing this well appear to start at least a full year in advance and try to finalize their projections by October. They employ full-time demographers who examine numbers from a historical and statistical point of view and who continually talk to planning officials, private land developers and other community groups involved in activities that may change districtwide or neighborhood student enrollments. And they carefully track the gap between their projections and actual enrollments each year so they can project more accurately the following year.

c. Even in the face of uncertainty, begin hiring the high-quality candidates in greatest demand

Of course, until budgets are finalized, and particularly in difficult economic times, it may be difficult to proceed with all new hiring. Armed with better revenue and enrollment projections, large urban districts must be willing, even in the face of some uncertainty, to do a significant amount of hiring before receiving their final budgets. As one suburban budget director explains, "If you don't do anything until every *i* is dotted, then you would never do any hiring." Another budget manager sees acting in the face of uncertainty as crucial to doing the job well: "A lot of people think you are a good budget manager if you don't take risks, but you have to take risks if you are managing a school system; otherwise you are denying the kids in the system."

To the extent a district may not be able to do all of its hiring, it is imperative that it focuses its early hires on the applicants it needs the most. This includes applicants in shortage areas who, we have seen, leave in large numbers if they are not hired quickly and will likely be needed regardless of any budget adjustments. It should also include the highest-achieving applicants, whom the district should clearly identify and target for early hiring.

d. Protect against overhiring

Efforts to improve projections and accelerate hiring based on those projections, however, must be coupled with initiatives to protect the hardest-to-staff districts and schools from budget fluctuations. Otherwise, administrators will not believe that the benefits of earlier hiring outweigh the risks of overhiring.

A monetary protection fund may be one way to mitigate fears of overhiring by shielding hard-to-staff districts and schools that have hired teachers early from a budget shortfall. Another option is instituting a small teacher reserve pool so that when there is teacher attrition in the early months, the district can fill the openings with high-quality teachers rather than underqualified long-term substitutes. "The notions of setting aside a reserve and overhiring are viewed as shortcomings in the current system," explains one former budget director, "but we need to legitimize them as good hiring practices."

A monetary protection fund may mitigate fears of overhiring by shielding hard-to-staff schools that have hired teachers early from a budget shortfall. Another option is a small teacher reserve pool.

Eliminating the October Teacher Shuffle

These budget reforms also will be essential to combating a strategy employed by some large urban districts for addressing faulty enrollment projections. If student/staffing ratios at the start of the school year do not meet projections and union requirements, some districts move teachers, and in some instances even students, from one school to another in October—a month or two after the school year has begun. We cannot overstate the negative educational ramifications of this October teacher shuffle. Moreover, implementing the student transfer requirements of the No Child Left Behind Act (which often occurs only after school-level achievement data becomes available) may only exacerbate teacher movement after the start of the school year unless districts improve their forecasts and adopt new approaches when their forecasting proves faulty.

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RECOMMENDATION 4: HR Practices

Revamp HR departments' practices to increase the hiring role of schools and to create efficient and effective HR systems for receiving, processing, tracking, and placing applicants.

a. Give schools an earlier and greater role in hiring

• Union reforms set the stage for a greater school-level role

HR departments in many larger urban districts, unlike in the suburbs, often retain a significant role in hiring. They typically receive vacancy lists and manage the transfer processes and excess pools. They also screen and interview candidates and then connect them with specific schools for an additional interview and job offer. It is also not uncommon for HR to offer jobs to candidates before they have met with school-based staff.

To promote an earlier and greater hiring role for schools, applicants should be able to apply centrally or to specific schools.

What is often overlooked is that in the context of a large hiring system with the systemwide transfer and seniority rights described above, central staff has little choice but to control the hiring process to ensure proper implementation of existing contractual requirements. The collective bargaining reforms described above would be essential to enabling schools to have a far earlier and larger role in filling their own vacancies.

• Multiple avenues of entry for teacher applicants

To promote an earlier and greater hiring role for schools, applicants should be able to apply centrally or to specific schools. We believe the majority of applicants will continue to apply through the central HR department, which will pre-screen and send them to specific schools for interviews. HR departments also should facilitate early school involvement by creating a database of pre-screened candidates with their résumés. This database could be searched by principals who could then contact individual applicants for an interview. In addition, principals and other school staff should be allowed to actively recruit and solicit applications from prospective teachers, arrange interviews, and offer jobs themselves.

We are not suggesting by this recommendation that all principals, or even a large majority, have demonstrated their ability to staff their schools effectively and with the highest-quality applicants. Moreover, it is likely that some principals will continue to show the same indifference to teacher hiring that they do now. Nevertheless, we believe a greater school role in hiring, if coupled with the transfer reforms recommended above, will prove essential to hiring reform. Rather than dragging their feet, school-based staff will forge closer connections with education school students, introduce them to their schools and teaching staff, and hire the best candidates as quickly as out-in-front districts.

What matters to education school students (and what most suburban districts give them) is a connection with specific schools and the knowledge of where they will teach as early as possible.

We also know that this is what education school students want: in focus groups, they told us that what matters most to them (and what most suburban districts give them) is a connection with specific schools, not the district, and the knowledge of where they will teach as early as possible.[30]

A greater school role in hiring must be coupled with accountability for improved hiring outcomes. Principals and schools that choose to increase their role in hiring and forego a central pre-screen of their candidates must be accountable for starting school without vacancies. They also must demonstrate that they are hiring the highest-quality applicants for particular openings. If they cannot make this demonstration over time, they should lose the authority to spearhead their own hiring.

b. Establish effective and efficient HR systems and processes for receiving, processing, tracking, and placing applicants

Even with an expanded school hiring role, central human resources staff will always have an important role in new teacher hiring. In large urban settings, economies of scale alone necessitate it. HR departments will continue to drive recruitment and pre-screening and arrange interviews for the majority of applicants. They will also now have to support schools' own hiring efforts and provide a new kind of oversight and quality control.

No matter what kind of policy changes are accomplished, hiring will be delayed significantly and applicants will be frustrated unless HR departments revamp their own systems for receiving, processing, tracking, and placing applicants.

• Create clear hiring goals and accountability

HR departments must start each hiring season with a careful review of past years' hiring needs, both at a high level and in terms of specific subject areas. These concrete numbers should drive the recruitment and hiring teams' efforts. Clear, data-driven goals will enable them to constantly monitor and refine strategies based on progress toward these goals, and to establish clear staff accountability for specific parts of the hiring process.

• Engage in strategic recruitment

HR departments must develop recruitment plans that are data-driven, geared toward a district's specific goals, and carefully evaluated. A strong recruitment plan should include prioritizing schools of education and high-caliber candidates, sending messages that will inspire the targeted candidates, and reaching out in creative ways, including through print and internet advertising.

• Develop an effective, efficient hiring process flow

Districts should create a streamlined, transparent applicant process with clearly defined hiring deadlines that are communicated in advance to applicants. The applicant process flow must detail turnaround times, staff responsibilities, and actions needed at each stage of the process. This will help create a sense of urgency on the part of HR staff and curb the endless shuffling and loss of applications that currently plague so many urban hiring systems.

A streamlined, transparent applicant process, a strong applicant tracking system, and an optimal staffing structure are key to an effective recruitment and hiring effort.

• Prioritize applicant tracking and data collection

Strong applicant and data tracking systems are the lynchpin of any effective recruitment and hiring effort. In a realigned hiring system, whether applicants apply through the district or directly to a school, their information must be included in a centrally managed applicant tracking system. In order to enable continuous improvements in recruitment, applicant processing, and customer service, this system should include: contact information; qualifications and certification status of each applicant and hire; wait times between key steps in the hiring process; total number of applicants, offers, and hires; number of and information about withdrawers and declined offers; and results from applicant surveys. A district must also maintain a single updated vacancy database from year to year, as well as a system for receiving and managing transfer requests. (Note: A tracking system need not be expensive or overly sophisticated to be effective—even a rudimentary system, when thoughtfully designed and dutifully maintained, can be tremendously helpful.)

• Create an optimal staffing structure

Finally, HR departments must focus on creating an optimal staffing structure, skill mix, and talent level for implementing these comprehensive reforms. For this to happen, a superintendent must prioritize hiring a high-quality HR director who, in turn, must hire new staff members and train and refocus existing staff based on the revised applicant tracking flow and schools' expanded hiring roles. Finally, ongoing performance and process measures must be established to ensure staff accountability for achieving clear objectives.

Although a collaborative approach will be necessary to achieve each recommendation, different stakeholders will have to assume different responsibilities. (See Appendix A.) We have not yet learned of a large urban district that has fully implemented the kinds of collective bargaining reforms or met the aggressive timelines that this report recommends. Nevertheless, as the following pages suggest, some districts have succeeded in implementing a number of the reforms advocated here.

Reform Efforts in Urban School Districts: Some Examples

Clark County Public Schools

In recent years, the Clark County School District—the sixth largest in the U.S.—has hired and placed 800-1,000 new teachers by the end of May. When asked how they manage to hire so many so early, Dr. George Ann Rice, Associate Superintendent for Human Resources, says, "Automation and aggressive recruitment are the keys to our success."

"We used to tell applicants: Don't contact us for 45 days. Now they are automatically uploaded into the main system and can be turned around within 24 hours."

Under Dr. Rice's leadership, the district has instituted a number of creative recruitment strategies to fill its 1,600 teacher openings annually. First, to recruit as widely as possible, it uses the Internet to advertise on 92 different Web sites. Second, the HR team analyzes applicant trends in order to fine-tune recruitment strategies; for example, all potential applicants complete an online interest form which includes their contact information and basic qualifications. When Clark County staff notices a spike in interest from a particular city or region, it will analyze the reasons and may decide to recruit more intensively in that area. Third, rather than relying on a full-time recruitment staff, the district relies on current and retired school administrators to recruit candidates or conduct screening interviews part-time. Finally, Clark County has instituted and widely publicized its alternate route program, which targets its areas of highest need, including bilingual and special education. Explains Rice: "This program is the only way we can fill all of our classrooms with certified teachers."

Clark County has successfully developed and leveraged technology to improve and expedite all aspects of its hiring process. Online applications, which account for 95 percent of all applications to the district, eliminate data entry and dramatically improve application turnaround times: "We used to tell applicants: Don't contact us for 45 days. Now they are automatically uploaded into the main system and can be turned around within 24 hours." By assigning passwords to potential applicants, HR staff members can identify and encourage candidates with incomplete applications to finish them. They can view an incomplete application to answer a candidate's questions. They can also cultivate high-need applicants through personalized messages, generated in a matter of minutes with a mass-mail function. Finally, by automating vacancy tracking and school budget allocations, the

district is far better positioned to know the positions it will have to fill.

A comprehensive applicant database also has transformed the matching of candidates with schools. Principals can review applicant information from their own offices, using searches to call up those applications that meet their desired criteria. "Let's say that a principal is looking for a middle school math teacher," explains Dr. Rice. "He can specify that he wants someone with a masters in math, who speaks Spanish, and has at least five years of experience. All of the matching profiles pop up on the screen." The HR Department pre-approves candidates, but principals can make the matches. HR, however, keeps the pressure on principals to hire quickly: "I say to principals, 'If you go on summer vacation without staffing your school, you may come back and find it staffed.'"

After the end of April, Clark County's principals are free to meet with new applicants and consider them side-by-side with transferring teachers.

None of these process improvements would have allowed for expedited hiring without Clark County's flexible transfer process. The teachers union contract specifies that the transfer process should run from April 1 through June 30, but after the end of April principals are free to meet with new applicants and consider them side-by-side with transferring teachers. This allows the District to offer specific school placements to a majority of its applicants by May 31—well ahead of most urban districts.

All of this is not to say that Clark County has been able to eliminate all teacher hiring challenges. This year, the state budget was not passed until July. Although early on the district started hiring the candidates that it knew it would need, the uncertainty significantly slowed the pace of hires—the number usually reached by May 31 was not reached until July.

San Diego Unified School District

When she took over the San Diego Unified School District's Human Resources Department in 1999, Dr. Deberie Gomez says her biggest challenge was the strong conservatism of administrative staff members, whose tremendous fear of overhiring prevented them from starting to hire until July, even if the district was in growth mode. As a result, San Diego not only lost the stronger applicants; it also was unable to make assignments before school started.

To combat this mindset, Gomez's department started right away with a year-round recruitment and hiring plan. Recognizing the importance of accurate enrollment and

staffing projections for earlier hiring, she drew upon the forecasts of a sophisticated group of demographers and budget staff. Even though the budget was not finalized until June, she staffed to the earlier projections.

San Diego's teacher transfer process consists of three "posts and bids." In January, May, and July, teachers wanting to transfer have two weeks to bid on previously announced vacancies. A position not receiving a bid during that period can be opened to an external hire. Gomez has encouraged schools to post their vacancies before the January "post and bid" process so that, if no one bids for a specific vacancy, it can be filled right away with a new teacher from outside the system. Moreover, schools now have more control over the transfer applicants they must hire. Although they must accept one of the top five bidders for a specific vacancy, they no longer have to hire the most senior teacher.

According to Gomez, there are still a number of vacancies to be filled in July, since there is no set date by which teachers retiring or resigning must provide notification. Nevertheless, it appears that her efforts already are making a difference—at least in the eyes of one of her most important customers. She explains, "My principals are now coming up to me and telling me that the quality of the teachers is wonderful."

By deferring to school committees to make the more subjective quality judgments about applicants, HR has recast its role from "hirer" to "quality control and clearinghouse."

Rochester Public School District

In 2001, the Rochester Public School District moved up its hiring to secure the best new teachers. First, the district provided significant monetary incentives for resigning or retiring teachers to provide notification by March 1. As part of this effort, they publicized that benefits would continue through the summer for these teachers. Knowing vacancies enabled Rochester to recruit and hire new teachers in March. Rochester provided open contracts at this time to applicants who could teach in a certification area and gave everyone placements by June.

School-based hiring committees also gained a greater hiring role. Rather than conducting extensive interviews of applicants to determine their quality, HR now does a faster review of each applicant's background and credentials and defers to the school committees to make the more subjective quality judgment about each applicant. This recasts HR's role from "hirer" to "quality control and clearinghouse." Schools also have a greater authority to fill vacancies with the transfer applicant of their choice. Only if they fail to hire any of the transfer applicants does seniority govern who fills a vacancy.

Conclusion

We believe that reforming teacher hiring timelines and processes is one of the most potent—and achievable—strategies for raising student achievement in urban schools.

The quality of the teacher in the classroom is the most significant school-based determinant of the academic growth of the children in that class. And yet the schools and students that most need the best teachers do not have them. This is not because the best teachers avoid these schools and these students; as this report demonstrates, with meaningful recruitment efforts, hundreds of high-quality teachers apply to teach in hard-to-staff-urban districts. Many later accept positions in suburban districts, not because they decide against teaching the urban students who most need them but out of frustration with the urban hiring timelines and processes.

The policy and practice barriers outlined here prevent urban districts from learning which openings exist, what funding will be available, and which teachers want those openings until long after other districts (and other employers) have made their first picks. The evidence suggests that although these barriers are frequently neglected by policymakers, they are among the greatest impediments to raising teacher quality in urban classrooms.

Taken together, all of these recommendations amount to a significant and difficult intervention that clearly departs from the kind of hiring reforms districts typically undertake. In the current competitive environment, however, with bidding wars for new teachers and the stakes raised by the teacher quality provisions of the No Child Left Behind law, it is more important than ever for urban districts to revamp their hiring systems and timetables so they can compete with other districts and sectors for the best new teacher talent.

While reforming urban teacher hiring timelines and processes alone will not be enough to close the achievement gap, we believe it is one of the most potent—and achievable—strategies for raising student achievement in urban schools. When urban districts do what is necessary to hire—rather than lose—their best applicants, their students will reap the large and well-documented impact of having excellent teachers.[31]

Appendix A: The Roles of Various Stakeholders in Reform

STAKEHOLDERS*	Recommendation #1: Vacancy Notifications	Recommendation #2: Teachers Union Transfer Requirements
Superintendent**	• In the short term, consider creative districtwide incentives for early notification • Remove any unintended barriers to early notification (e.g., loss of health benefits)	• Prioritize contract negotiations as an opportunity to address collective bargaining obstacles to early and effective new teacher hiring
Teachers Union	• Advocate moving up vacancy notifications for resigning or retiring teachers to March 15th at the latest • Remove any unintended barriers to early notification (e.g., loss of health benefits)	• Advocate completing transfer processes by April 1 and strategies to expedite these processes • Support transfer reforms that move toward enabling schools to consider internal and external candidates equally • Explore alternatives to seniority rights in layoff situations
Human Resources Staff	• Actively seek vacancy notifications as early as possible; publicize any incentives for doing so (and the lack of disincentives)	• Expedite the transfer process • Continue to process external applicants during the transfer process to minimize hiring disruptions
Principals/Schools	• Actively seek vacancy notifications as early as possible; publicize any incentives for doing so (and the lack of disincentives)	
State Officials	• Ensure that state laws are consistent with the goal of March vacancy notifications by resigning or retiring teachers	• Develop strategies to reform any legislation that reinforces the kinds of transfer, seniority, and layoff requirements described in this report

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Recommendation #3: Budget Timetable and Forecasting	**Recommendation #4: HR Practices**
• Ensure that the district budget office has adequate access to demographers and other resources for forecasting enrollment and budgets • Explore option of overhiring funds for hardest-to-staff schools	• Prioritize hiring and retaining high-quality HR director and staff to implement reforms
	• Embrace school-level hiring initiatives
• Work with district budget staff to develop early staffing forecasts, based on careful enrollment and budget forecasts	• Build more collaborative relationships with schools and increase their roles in new teacher hiring • Implement well-functioning systems and processes, including: **1.** Efficient hiring process flow **2.** Applicant tracking **3.** Strategic recruitment **4.** Hiring goals and targets **5.** Effective staffing structure, including high-quality, well-trained staff
• Work closely with central staff to increase accuracy of school-level enrollment projections	• Take advantage of new hiring rights to aggressively recruit and hire the best applicants
• Understand that late budgets severely impact teacher quality • Examine options for passing education budgets earlier • Develop mechanisms for helping urban districts forecast state education budgets	

While achieving all four recommendations in this report will require a collaborative approach, different stakeholders will inevitably have to assume different responsibilities, as this table illustrates.

*School boards are not included in this chart because of their dramatically varying roles in different school systems depending on such factors as whether they are the policy-setting agent and whether they are elected or appointed. If the board establishes policy for a district, for example, it, along with the superintendent, must set the policy agenda for hiring reform and commit to the changes needed to achieve it. Therefore, any district working to reform its hiring policies and practices must identify how its school board influences hiring and the most constructive role it can play.

**Superintendents also have a general role in reform that includes:

- Recognize that teacher quality drives student achievement
- Commit to the ultimate goal of hiring all new teachers by May 1 and to short-term goal of 30-40% by May 1 and rest by June 1
- Set the agenda for policy reform
- Lead collaboration of key stakeholders

Methodology

The Four Districts

The four districts studied in this report are geographically diverse, located in the Southwestern, Midwestern, and Eastern areas of the United States. All four are listed in the central city of a Metropolitan Statistical Area, based on U.S. Census Codes. They average just fewer than 73,000 students each, and the largest district has more than 150,000 students. 65 percent to 75 percent of the students qualify for a free or reduced-price lunch. All four districts struggle to fill their classrooms and typically open school with significant vacancies.

Sources of Quantitative Data

Our work with each district involved creating applicant tracking databases to record basic applicant information and details on an applicant's status for the 2002 recruitment and hiring season. In addition, we conducted follow-up surveys in two districts, and we were given permission to access actual files to enable file review analysis in one district. (Note: In the Eastern District and two Midwestern Districts (Midwestern District 1 and Midwestern District 2), we worked directly with the human resources departments on all recruitment and hiring; in the Southwestern District, we ran a special program for a cohort of high-needs teachers for placement in hard-to-staff schools.)

Applicant Tracking System. Applicant tracking systems at each site yielded data on the number of applicants, the dates of application, offers and other hiring benchmarks (in the Southwestern and two Midwestern Districts), as well as notice of withdrawal.

In the Eastern District and two Midwestern Districts, the applicant tracking databases have a major limitation: they do not accurately reflect the total number of withdrawers. Some candidates actively told the districts that they were no longer interested in a position either by calling the district or in response to a communication from the district. These "active withdrawers" were duly recorded in paper files but not always in the database. We also believe that there were a vast number of "silent withdrawers" who opted out of the process but never informed the district and were therefore never recorded in the databases as having withdrawn. In order to compensate for this deficiency, we conducted follow-up telephone surveys in two districts.

Follow-up surveys in the Eastern District and Midwestern District 1. In both districts, we targeted two populations:

1. "Active Withdrawers": Individuals who were identified as withdrawers in the 2002 applicant tracking database because they had actively informed the district of their decision to withdraw.
2. "Unknowns": Individuals for whom there was no final status in the 2002 applicant tracking database.

We attempted to contact all individuals in these categories for whom we had an e-mail address or telephone number. When by telephone, attempts were made to reach the individuals at four distinct times.

The Eastern District's response rates ranged from 27 percent (66 of 246 with contact information; population=363) for unknowns to 50 percent for active withdrawers (61 of 123 with contact information; population=132), for a total response rate of 34 percent.

Midwestern District 1's response rates ranged from 32 percent (25 of 77 with contact information; population=80) for active withdrawers to 38 percent for individuals of unknown status (74 of 196 with contact information; population=204), for a total response rate of 36 percent.

In both districts, the surveys yielded data on the number of withdrawers and, for people identified as withdrawers, date of withdrawal, factors contributing to withdrawal, current employment, a gauge of current interest in still teaching in the district, and GPA.

In some cases, questions were asked of only a sub-sample of respondents, and therefore numbers of respondents in each district and each category will vary for some variables. However, we do not believe that those whom we were able to reach would be unrepresentative of the population as a whole.

File analysis. In order to directly compare the quality of hires against withdrawers, we received permission from the Eastern District to conduct an in-depth analysis of the files of members of both groups. We looked at the files of both new hires and withdrawers and gleaned data on GPA, amount of education coursework, degrees, and years of teaching experience.

Other sources of quantitative data. In addition, we undertook exit interviews with withdrawers in the Southwestern District and written surveys by the withdrawers in Midwestern District 2 (n=24, a response rate of 21 percent).

Sources of Qualitative Data

In addition to the quantitative data described above, this report draws upon several informal sources of qualitative data. These include informal focus groups with faculty at schools of education, new and experienced teachers, and education school students. We also interviewed human resources staff in districts near our four focus districts to learn about their hiring timelines.

Acknowledgments

The New Teacher Project (TNTP) is a nonprofit organization dedicated to partnering with educational entities to enhance their capacity to recruit, select, train, and support new teachers effectively. With the conviction that the recruitment and retention of effective new teachers must be an integral aspect of any school reform movement, The New Teacher Project is dedicated to ensuring that all of our schools are staffed with highly qualified teachers.

TNTP was formed in 1997 to address the growing issues of teacher shortages and teacher quality throughout the country. TNTP has a diverse staff of more than 60 people, including former educators, education policy experts, and strategy consultants from top-tier private sector firms. Since its inception, it has worked with school districts and state departments of education to significantly improve the quality of their teaching forces. It has attracted and prepared more than 10,000 new, high-quality teachers and launched 39 programs in 19 states.

The Annie E. Casey Foundation (AECF) has worked since 1948 to build better futures for disadvantaged children and their families in the United States. The primary mission of the foundation is to foster public policies, human service reforms, and community supports that more effectively meet the needs of today's vulnerable children and families.

Washington Mutual (WAMU) has been helping make communities better places to live, learn, and work for more than 100 years. The company annually returns 2 percent of its pre-tax earnings to communities through grants, sponsorships and other assistance, with an emphasis on K-12 public education and affordable housing. With a history dating back to 1889, Washington Mutual is a financial services company providing a diversified line of products and services, including consumer banking, mortgage lending, and commercial banking, with financial services offices located nationwide.

About the Authors

Jessica Levin is Chief Knowledge Officer of The New Teacher Project. She served as both an Instructor at the Harvard Graduate School of Education and as a consultant to the Boston Plan for Excellence in Public Schools, a Boston-based local school reform initiative. Jessica previously served for four years as an elementary and secondary education policy advisor to Marshall Smith, the acting Deputy Secretary of the U.S. Department of Education in Washington, D.C. In her first job after graduating from law school, with support from an Echoing Green Fellowship, Jessica founded and directed a national project to work with parents, advocates, and teachers to improve Title I education programs in low-income schools. Jessica holds a B.A. in social studies from Harvard College and a J.D. from Yale Law School.

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Endnotes

1 Linda Darling-Hammond, "Teacher Quality and Student Achievement: A Review of State Policy Evidence," *Education Policy Analysis Archives*, 8 (1) (2000); Kati Haycock, "Good Teaching Matters . . . A Lot," *Thinking K-16*, 3 (2), (The Education Trust, 1998), 1-5.

2 Craig D. Jerald, "All Talk, No Action: Putting an End to Out-of-Field Teaching," (The Education Trust, 2002), 9.

3 "Quality Counts 2003: Ensuring a Highly Qualified Teacher for Every Classroom," *Education Week*, (January 2003), 43-44; National Commission on Teaching and America's Future (1996), 34-39; Edward Liu, "New Teachers' Experiences of Hiring: Preliminary Findings From a Four-State Study (a paper prepared for the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association, Chicago, April 2003), 9.

4 National Center for Education Statistics. Data are for the 2001-2 school year.

5 In the Southwestern District, for which we had the most complete information, more than 250 applicants—or 37 percent of the total applicants—were certified to teach in a shortage area. The Eastern District's percentage, also 37 percent, was for the pool of applicants who had passed an initial district paper screen and interview ("pre-screened" applicants). The percentage of high-need applicants in the total application pool was unavailable.

6 These data are from an in-depth analysis by The New Teacher Project of the files of hires and withdrawers in one district.

7 The details of the process vary from district to district. The recent study of teacher hiring in four states by Edward Liu of Harvard's Project on the Next Generation of Teachers showed that 54.1 percent of new teachers are hired through a process that begins centrally. All four of the districts studied here followed this process, and our experience is that urban districts have a disproportionate amount of centralized hiring. Liu, 12.

8 Recent research has documented that the teacher shortage is not uniform and demonstrates that urban, high-poverty, and high-minority enrollment districts are the districts most likely to resort to opening the school year when not yet fully staffed. This research, however, does not examine the number and quality of the applicants who are lost to these districts because of their hiring timelines or how these losses contribute to their hiring challenges—the focus of the present study. Patrick J. Murphy and Michael M. DeArmond, *From the Headlines to the Frontlines: The Teacher Shortage and its Implications for Recruitment Policy* (University of Washington, Center on Reinventing Public Education, 2003), 20-25.

9 Application numbers for previous years are not available because the districts did not track them.

10 Percentage of high-need applicants in total applicant pool is not available.

11 The withdrawal data for the Eastern District and Midwestern District 1 are the attrition rates of the "pre-screened" applicants—those the districts had already interviewed, decided were the best candidates, and chosen for principal interviewing.

12 We do not have the total percentage of withdrawers for Midwestern District 2 because we did not do an extensive follow-up telephone surveys as we did in the Eastern District and Midwestern District 1 to identify the percentage of withdrawers among the applicants of unknown status at the end of the hiring process.

13 Note that in Midwestern District 1, there was a small survey sample for this question.

14 In a survey of urban schools undertaken in 1998-1999, 52.5 percent of urban districts reported an immediate demand for elementary school teachers, 97 percent reported an immediate demand for high school science teachers, and 97.5 percent reported an immediate demand for special education teachers. Recruiting New Teachers, Council of Great City Schools, and Council of the Great City Colleges of Education. *The Urban Teacher Challenge: Teacher Demand and Supply in the Great City Schools (2000).*

15 Data presented in the recent report by Patrick and DeArmond document the vacancy effect in central cities through a slightly different lens: the late-fill rate, which they define as the relative share of total teachers that were hired after the start of the school year. Although urban districts accounted for 29 percent of the teaching positions in the country, they represented 41 percent of the late-fill positions in the 1999-2000 school year. Patrick and DeArmond, 22.

16 Data were not available for Midwestern District 1.

17 Although GPA data for new hires were taken from transcripts, withdrawer GPA data were self-reported from applications. As withdrawers were never required to submit transcripts, it is possible that those with the lowest GPAs did not report them. Therefore, these data should be interpreted with some caution.

18 "Degree in field" means that the individual's undergraduate or graduate degree was in the same subject as the area in which the individual applied to teach. Where more than one subject area existed, it was counted as a "yes" if a degree matched any of the subject areas. Individuals who applied in elementary education had to have a degree in elementary education to meet this standard.

19 "Significant education coursework" means the individual: (1) had a degree in education; (2) had met the pedagogy coursework requirements for certification in the Eastern District's state; or (3) based on courses reported on a transcript or resume, could have been expected to meet or come within two classes of meeting the pedagogy coursework requirements for certification.

20 "Years of teaching experience" is years of lead teaching experience. Where teaching for the 2002 school year was still underway at the time of application, this was counted as a full year.

21 Ronald F. Ferguson, "Paying for Public Education: New Evidence on How and Why Money Matters," *Harvard Journal on Legislation*, 28 (2) (1991), 465-498; Ronald F. Ferguson and Helen F. Ladd, "How and Why Money Matters: An Analysis of Alabama Schools," in *Holding Schools Accountable: Performance-Based Reform in Education*, ed. H. F. Ladd (Washington, D.C.: The Brookings Institution, 1996), 265-298; Andrew J. Wayne and Peter Youngs, "Teacher Characteristics and Student Achievement Gains: A Review," *Review of Educational Research*, 73 (1) (2003), 89-122.

[22] David H. Monk, "Subject-Area Preparation of Secondary Mathematics and Science Teachers and Student Achievement," *Economics of Education Review*, 13(2) (1994), 125-145; Wayne and Youngs (2003).

[23] Eric A. Hanushek, John F. Kain, and Steven G. Rivkin, "Teachers, Schools, and Academic Achievement," NBER Working Paper No. 6691 (1998); Rob Greenwald, Larry V. Hedges, and Richrd D. Laine, "The Effect of School Resources on Student Achievement," *Review of Education Research*, 66 (1996), 361-396.

[24] Cathy W. Hall, Kris M. Smith, and Rosina Chia, "Relationship Between Metacognition and Affective Variables in College Achievement," *National Social Science Journal* 19(i), (2002), 43-50.

[25] A recent report examining teacher shortages also discusses the ways that teachers union transfer requirements can slow teacher recruitment, hiring, and placement. Murphy and DeArmond, 48-49.

[26] National Conference of State Legislatures.

[27] Withdrawer telephone surveys in the Eastern District and Midwestern District 1.

[28] Some of the Eastern District's open offers were binding; all of the Southwestern District's open offers were nonbinding.

[29] Focus groups conducted by The New Teacher Project in Midwestern District 1 with student teachers, new teachers, experienced teachers, and local education school students (January 2001 and February 2001). Focus groups conducted by The New Teacher Project in the Southwestern District with newly hired teachers (August 2001). Additional focus groups with "outstanding student teachers" at two schools of education (December 2000 and March 2001).

[30] Focus groups conducted by The New Teacher Project.

[31] Darling-Hammond (2000); Haycock, 1-5.

Notes

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